

# Life, We're All In It Together



Patrick Thorne

This book is about the Soviet Union after the arrival of glasnost as seen through the eyes of a young British author. Patrick Thorne's first visit to the Soviet Union involved meetings with members of Soviet society, individuals from all walks of life. They talked frankly and honestly about their opinions of glasnost and how it affects their lives. Many of their unedited comments are reproduced in this volume.

The author also compared various aspects of Soviet life with that in his own country, for better or worse, with the aim of promoting understanding on both sides.

The book concludes with an analysis of why the world remains "split in two" and suggests what might be done to improve the situation.

# Patrick Thorne

## **Life, We're All In It Together**



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Патрик Торн

МЫ ВСЕ ЖИВЕМ В ОДНОМ МИРЕ

*На английском языке*

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**PART ONE.**  
**TRAVEL TO THE USSR**

## FOREWORD

*"The participation in the reorganisation by every one of us begins with straightforward and open expression of our personal opinion about what is taking place."*

*Pravda, August 1987*

This book was written to fill a need of my own and a need that perhaps exists in many people. Though the situation has improved in recent years with the coming of glasnost, I have been faced with a number of questions stemming from ignorance. The questions were basic ones:

"Why do the Soviet Union want a nuclear war?"

"Why do they want to spread communism all over the world?"

"What actually is communism anyway?"

"Do Soviet citizens ever laugh?"

"Why is it that Soviets all appear so fat and ugly yet seem to spend all their days standing in bread queues?"

"If the majority of Soviets are Jews wanting to join the Western dole queues, why don't they have a revolution?", and so on.

My problem was that the information services in my own country told me all these things about the USSR, but never gave any reasons. I couldn't see why anybody wanted to live there at all. It was for this reason that I wrote to a Soviet publisher, expressing my interest. My fear, I suppose, was that if we were being told that all Soviets were horrible non-entities desperate for war, the population of the Soviet Union might be being told exactly the same thing about us.

It just seemed horribly simple for everyone involved to at

least attempt to be nice, or even vaguely positive about each other, so with the world on the edge of self-destruction, I couldn't understand why no one was trying to do so? I knew little or nothing about Lenin or Marx, but I had read 1984.

Well, the publisher said "Yes", and I went around the country and this book is about what I thought and the people I met. I'm no great scholar, in Russian or anything; I'm certainly no great writer, I'm afraid, but I've done my best to give a relatively rounded impression. I've also tried to compare the good and the bad things from East and West, rather than just treating the USSR as if it were on a planet by itself as most writers seem to like to. I have tried to get some sort of a balance, many headaches later I realise this is near impossible, but this is what I have attempted, a book that can be agreed with or disagreed with by open-minded people on both sides. People who will ask themselves why they agree or disagree.

I should add finally that I am not a "raving communist" or anything really. I found answers to some of my questions in the Soviet Union, but I had to check back to home. The answers are to be found on both sides, if they're anywhere.

*Patrick Thorne*

## THE MENTAL JOURNEY

People from my country know very little about the Soviet Union. I was never taught a single word about the country during my fourteen years of compulsory education. The nation that covers a sizable chunk of the world never made it into geography. Nor into history, politics or religious studies (though I'm told it did in some of my friends...). The choice of languages was French, German or Latin. Russian education does exist; my sister studied Russian History at University. But for the great mass of the population the Soviet Union is a wholly unknown quantity.

At the same time it is this "mass" of the population that read and absorb our mass media. Many of the newspapers in this category, no longer carry news or even vague truths but are instead involved in a sort of mixture of entertaining, shocking, and transporting the mind of the reader away from real life. The papers wallow in tales of rape and sexual abuse, appealing to the lowest human instincts and themselves perpetuating and increasing the problems. The Soviet Union also, finally, puts in an appearance here. Because we have problems with crime, unemployment and so on, a country which really no one knows anything about is needed as a decoy.

Hence our papers read "Britain is Fantastic, Russia is Awful" and then dig up some story about one of my countrymen having a success in creating a job for himself (and totally ignoring the five million who haven't) followed by a double page spread about either some Russian Jews who would like to get back to Israel, or some Russian man who has married an English woman (or vice versa) and would like to leave the country too, but in both cases the authorities block them, and they lose their standing at work. Our papers totally ignore the successes of the Soviet Union, just as they ignore the failings of our own society. They are in the business of selling papers, not standing up for what is right or telling what's possibly true.

## THE BUREAUCRATIC SOCIETY

"Breaking in" to the Soviet Union is not easy. To people from abroad the repeated message as we try to gain entrance is, "We don't want you here, why not give up?" Of course the Soviet Union is not alone in having complex visa requirements and tough immigration control, but surely there is no other country that additionally manages to instill such a sense of hopelessness in a potential visitor, a realisation that after all your efforts to get in, you could still be stopped and told, "No, we don't want you here, get lost," without any given reason, right up to the last moment. The feeling given all the way along is that, simply by applying for a visa, you have committed some crime against the Soviet Union, and that your bureaucratic journey is some sort of punishment.

This is especially disconcerting when you are, you think, on a mission of friendship; and even more irritating when you arrive in Moscow to discover that all the form-filling and delays are merely pointless petty bureaucracy and that it would in reality be very easy to smuggle whatever you wished into the country—as the thriving black market illustrates.

Punishment begins at the Soviet Consulate in London, conveniently open between 10 and 12 in the morning, with a range of permanently engaged phone numbers also available. To get down to London between 10 and 12 from my home town (Nottingham) means leaving at shortly after 5 a.m. This is not because there are no nice modern trains that can do the journey in 90 minutes, but because in this instance Soviet socialist bureaucracy has made a rare deal with British capitalism to make it extra difficult for the individual to do what he's told. Our state rail network operates a policy where tickets for all trains on longer distance routes depart-

ing between 6 and 9 am cost twice or even five times as much as those before 6 and after 9. Therefore only the rich, or those whose tickets are paid for by their companies, are able to travel. (Demand for rail travel continues to rise, despite its unreliability and the increasingly overcrowded trains. The answer of the railways is not to put on more trains but to raise prices so that poorer people can't afford to travel.)

Arriving at the Consulate, the first introduction to the Soviet way of life, an almost stationary queue winds round the building frontage. After an hour and a half of being slowly soaked, edging ever nearer to the sanctuary of the porch, only six people stand between entry to the Consulate and, almost as important by this time, escape from the rain.

Incidentally, I read a piece in the *Observer*, (alas, too late!) by Peter Ustinov who describes his experience exactly as mine. He also points out that in France people are allowed to wait under cover, though no one dare ask why the French receive such preferential treatment!

Meanwhile, the time creeps towards midday and I begin to worry that we shall all be told to come back another day.

Finally I am in! I wander through a huge elegant hall full of empty leather armchairs and coffee tables. In the far right corner a guard casually peers out of the window; on the immediate left are three bank style desks with thick glass screens. From behind one of them a clerk snaps "Yes?"

"Er... I've come about a visa..." I reply pathetically.

"What do you mean, visa?"

"Aha, a trick question," I think.

"You know, one of those things you need to gain entry to the Soviet Union with..."

"Yes, tourist, business." His sneer is replaced by scepticism, so I pull out a wad of correspondence from my publisher, Progress, the final telegram instructing me to head to the Embassy to get my visa. (After hanging round the Embassy for half an hour earlier in the day, I had decided it looked a bad bet and that trying to find my way round the back would only lead to fame in the newspapers and probable injury, so I had taken a chance on my research and found the Consulate.)

There is some recognition at this, and I am handed a form to fill in, which I do on one of the coffee tables, overhearing a conversation between an elderly gentleman and another desk clerk, the tail end of which goes.

Old man, "I think you must have made a mistake."

Clerk (seething), "We do not make mistakes!"

Old man (trembling, realising his mistake), "No, no, of course not, it must be my fault..."

I hand the form back, embarrassed to discover I can't remember which clerk I got it from—they all look the same. I am then informed that my visa isn't ready, given a card and told to come back in two weeks. I must leave my passport.

"Would it be possible for you to post it to me?"

My ridiculous query is met with the contempt it deserves, and I rapidly leave the building, realising my shirt is soaked with perspiration. The huge portrait of Lenin looks down benignly on me as I go.

Two weeks later, ten days before my departure date, the process is repeated, this time successfully. Having been ripped-off over the price of an entry visa to Hungary the previous year, I am pleasantly surprised to find that the visa is free.

"That's one up to Soviet socialist bureaucracy," I think. "At least they're not doing it for profit!"

I carry my prized visa to the nearest bar and instantly buy both it and myself a pint of beer to celebrate our new friendship.

(Note: those travelling Intourist can benefit from their express visa service, which charges a small amount to do your dirty work for you and requires only photocopies of your passport.)

I have read about ten assorted guides on travel in the USSR, but only found one that actually gave me a complete picture. The remainder were either brief guides in newspapers or magazines that couldn't resist having little propaganda digs at the Soviets (examples: safe to assume your hotel room is bugged; you may have to bribe doctors to treat you if you're sick, etc.), or equally useless guides thriving on the super Moscow sights, but completely ignoring the practicalities. The Intourist brochure *Useful Hints For Travel In the USSR* contains much basic useful information, but fails to note the practical difficulties of actually trying to do any of the things they advise.

The book I found useful is *USSR. From an Original Idea by Karl Marx* published in 1986. It was written by two British graduates in Russian who organised "Real Life" tours of the Soviet Union. The book is satirical, laughing at the



bureaucracy and at the same time laughing at equally farcical preconceptions we hold ourselves, which are part of the reason why the bureaucratic journey to the USSR is so bewildering. Indeed the trip can be regarded as an introduction to what is perhaps the major problem between our two cultures, that is our wholly different interpretations of an idea or a process. It is not as simple as the viewpoints just being opposite to each other, it is a wholly different attitude which often leads to long heavy discussions and great mental manouvering just to understand the most basic concepts. Once understood, we can learn, but often it is far easier to say "that's stupid" (from one's own point of view) and ignore it, rather than battle with the brain-ache of attempted comprehension. On the other hand there do seem to be areas where one society is more successful than the other (examples: income equality, crime prevention, fair health and education in the USSR; intelligent shopping systems, adequate consumer production and so on in the West).

Having myself survived the horrors of the unemployment industry in Great Britain—endless form-filling, futile trips to sign a form every fortnight, and as many more futile trips in the meantime—I am now relatively adept at handling most bureaucratic situations I am faced with. This basically involves waiting for the standard procedure to fail, then writing once a day to the Managing Director of a private company (e.g. Insurance Company, Bank, Travel Company etc) or my MP if it's the Inland Revenue, DOE etc., enclosing a business card, noting my planned article on the inefficiency of the organisation in question, and hey presto, 48 hours later I get what I want. In fact, as most of such problems seem to be generated by all relevant information being fed into computers by overworked and undertrained staff, the complication of pressure from above mixing with standard procedure often results in my getting what I want two or three times over.

However, such a policy on my part must be preceded by impeccable behaviour in the early stages, which means smiling through the form-filling and queueing, smiling when they lose the forms and you have to fill in some more and start all over again, and expressing concern that staff are overworked by government/management cutbacks.

This was my approach to Moscow's Sheremetyevo-2 International Airport. It didn't work.

Doubts began as we crossed the Baltic in the British Airways jet—a particularly nice one, full of fat, rich American businessmen cramped up in Club Class at the front, hurrying along their cardiac arrests with the rich in-flight catering. I was fortunate enough to be travelling economy, which was completely empty. Meanwhile the flight staff made a last ditch attempt to keep up our capitalist ideals by tempting us to spend money on champagne and other in-flight necessities. (With a single exception—in a Moscow restaurant—this was the last occasion before my return to Britain that anyone actually smiled at me as they relieved me of cash.)

Meanwhile I looked out of the window. My first impressions of the Soviet Union were of its physical size and the fact that it was raining. Clear skies over the Netherlands and southern Scandinavia changed to a bank of dark shrouding cloud as we crossed the Soviet coastline—a dream come true for all those Western journalists who set out to portray the country as dark and mysteriously foreboding.

After two hours of cloud we landed, and then came two hours of “airport experience”—more perfect copy for the unfriendly journalist to send home to his paper. Once off the plane it’s time for the first stationary Soviet queue since the Consulate. Passport Control. Here a very young spotty-faced adolescent stares at you in a mood of total suspicion for the better part of ten minutes with occasional breaks to mutter harshly into a telephone, call another young man over to stare at you, or violently to stamp your visa and passport. All attempts to avoid this psychological will-breaking experience fail, staring back, smiling pleasantly, trying to look casual or staring at the ceiling just don’t work. You’re as convinced as the chap in the glass box apparently is that you are not just a friendly tourist but are in fact here to undermine the whole fabric of Soviet society. When you finally get your passport and visa back the relief on your part automatically produces a polite English “Thank you”—a custom which seems to be totally avoided everywhere in the Soviet Union (but then, logically, there’s little reason to thank a schoolboy for giving you a nervous breakdown as you enter the country).

Next stop is the stationary queue for Customs, crushing all your baggage through the X-rays device, handing over the form and trying to explain that your library card, cash card, cheque card, phone card and the photo of your girl

friend aren't forms of foreign currency; and wonder why you have so many cards and a suspiciously small amount of money.

Two hours later it's finally time to leave customs and meet your Soviet contact—who's in a bad mood because you're late. Time to stand in the huge queue for taxis, which is controlled by an old man with lots of medal ribbons on his jacket who blatantly accepts bribes from people at the back of the queue so that they get any taxis that turn up. Welcome to the USSR!

## THE SOVIET UNION ACCORDING TO INTOURIST

The taxi journey into Moscow was an experience in itself. Rightly or wrongly I compared many aspects of that city to London, a place I dislike. There are some differences, of course; Moscow streets are much wider and there seem to be few rules regulating traffic (I was later impressed by the miniature street layouts in all schools). The lack of bright shops, advertisement displays, neon lights, bars, cafes, even graffiti, all make Moscow appear dull, grey and imposing to those not about to marvel at the architecture.

What decoration there is tends to be huge street murals depicting victorious soldiers, heroic workers or a desire for "Peace against Imperialism".

I took "Peace against Imperialism" as a personal insult; it was four weeks before friends finally explained to me the Soviet definitions of imperialism, communism, capitalism and socialism. At this point I merely saw this poster in much the same light as a Soviet might have viewed the full page Conservative election poster in *The Times* that week "The nuclear deterrent has saved England from Russia for 40 years".

A Russian would quite rightly say, "I'm a Russian and I don't want to bomb England." I thought, "I'm part of an imperialist nation and I want peace."

My own comprehension problem probably stems from our national decision to view all Soviet people as one huge seething mass of communists, government and people together (apart from the oppressed Jews and the would-be Polish style Trade Union leaders that Western newsmen are always trying to dig up.)

One chap said to me in Leningrad, "I can't see why you don't think of us as individuals." There are reasons, of course, from my country's viewpoint, but at the time I settled

for depressing him still further by revealing that many of my countrymen regard Soviets as hardly human, let alone individuals. Others were to tell me of people they had met abroad, especially in America, who had no idea where the USSR is; one claimed he had met someone who had never heard of Russia and insisted he must be from Hawaii.

But anyway, there were no adverts for Coca-Cola, and I even discovered that the "commies" aren't even "commies" yet, just progressive socialists.

The taxi ride was an education in itself. We shared the car with a woman also going to the centre and conversation started immediately. The taxi driver took an equal part in this. A small occurrence, but twenty taxi journeys later the attitude was the same, there was a sense of equality. There was no superiority on the part of the directors and publishers I travelled with. Of course it is perfectly possible to talk with a taxi driver wherever you are, but this was an early indication that there is no real class structure in employment. There is a Soviet Elite, there is the structure from trainee to director within Soviet companies, but the attitude "I'm paying you to drive this car, and to talk to me or shut up as I see fit", never arose during my visit. It was the first indication I had of how power is not so directly related to money in the USSR, as it is at home. A good thing. Of course there were negative results of this same thing too—as anyone looking objectively will discover in every difference between the Soviet society and their own. But this first indication of comradeship, after the taxi queue where money still bought power, was one of the first things I liked.

The hotel wasn't so pleasing: the staff seemed incredibly rude, unhelpful and basically gave the impression that they wished you weren't there, that the hotel ran much better without guests coming in and cluttering up the routine. It was similar impression to that from the Consulate to the airport. Only the taxi driver had seemed friendly, even though we couldn't use words to communicate with each other.

The hotel was really quite amusing, a plaque on the wall at the reception quoted a clause of the Soviet Constitution stating that all Soviet citizens must work towards peace, and underneath sat a woman snarling at any foreigner daring to try to check in.

Soviet hotel rooms are strange places. The quilts on the

beds are always folded in such a way that you have to take them off and remake the bed. The radios vary between dud and the Orwellian "cannot be turned off" variety. Televisions may be semi-functional B & W the size of washing machines or quite modern colour models with a good (if not Japanese standard) picture.

It was on my arrival that I first tried to phone home. The huge list of "Hotel Services" apparently includes all those offered by the hotel over the past 50 years (which should serve as a warning for the subsequent restaurant 'menu'). Now many services are defunct or the staff simply don't wish to provide them, and say "Niet". I tried ringing to book a phone line home. The number was perpetually engaged, but at approximately every twentieth attempt I was answered. I described the experience in my diary: "I've tried to ring home more than fifty times now, especially to my grandmother as she is most worried about my being here. Anyway, as it's only 7 a.m. in England, she'll be the only one up. I've now written a telegram which I intend to send to her later.

"I finally realised they had the wrong number for the telephone exchange, and worked out the new one, getting through to the International Numbers Exchange. I had some success, gave the girl Granny's number, but then the varying engaged signal went on for eleven minutes before I hung up. Tried again, and just got a "No" and the phone slammed down, followed by the same treatment without comment on successive occasions."

Two days later I was surprised to get a call straight through, and even more surprised to find the bill was £90 for thirty minutes. All other public services being cheap in Moscow I had foolishly assumed that phoning would cost less or little more than in other countries. I had visited Hungary nine months earlier and made a three minute call for 10 p.

Avoiding the foreign currency bar the final two stops during the first day in your Soviet hotel are the restaurant, and first the Beriozka shop.

The Beriozka shops that exist across the continent in almost all Intourist establishments, sell "luxury" goods unobtainable in most Soviet stores. Normal Soviet citizens cannot shop in them as only foreign currency is accepted. This results in the occasional embarrassing situation when some casual Soviet acquaintance (often so casual that you had never met them until they approached you in the street two

minutes earlier) asks if you would be good enough to help them, it's their birthday that very day (amazing coincidence) and they want to buy a beer for their friends. Russian beer is either not available or bad, so would you help them by buying them some in the Beriozka?

Another reason for the surly attitude of shop, restaurant or office staff, even when, as in the Beriozka shops, they virtually beg for your foreign currency, is of course the lack of competition. Whilst British Airways staff, for example, know that if they're not friendly and polite customers will choose another airline next time, and that if all their staff are as ratty as your average Russian, then the company will quickly lose all its trade to another airline and they'll all be out of work; Russians know that they can be as impolite as they wish, there being no alternative to turn to for superior service.

Yet even this attitude is short-sighted, indirectly. For example, in a Beriozka shop I was subjected to an hour's wait having written out a Eurocheque for the amount in question. These Eurocheques had been in circulation for two years at the time and they were listed in the cashier's manual, yet she came up with endless reasons why it couldn't be accepted. Five phone calls to a superior were equally fruitless, the superior being equally ignorant of the form of payment. Yet for two years in Europe the cheques have been promoted as the major form of currency.

In the end clearance was given, and the girl apologised for the problem (rare) but explained that she stood to repay five times the amount of the cheque itself if it was bad. And yet, if it had not been for my desire to buy the object in question, it being my last chance before departure, I would have given up my attempt after a few minutes, and the foreign currency, apparently so valuable, would have been lost. If I had the attitude of many of my countrymen, I would also take this as another example of the inferiority of the Soviet system to our own.

The restaurant is another great Soviet experience for the bewildered foreigner. It begins by standing awkwardly in the doorway, open to the apparent derision of other more successful diners. After ten minutes, when no one makes a move to show you to your table, you approach a waitress who ignores you for as long as possible before thrusting you into a seat and throwing a menu at you. The menu is a strange

device, a huge list of hundreds of dishes which you wade through. If you're lucky, someone will explain to you that this is in fact a list of all the food ever served in Moscow over the last fifty years, and that the items you might actually get in this restaurant are the ones with prices next to them. Suddenly your choice is hugely curtailed. It is only when the waiter turns up and, if he bothers to hang around to listen to your order, points out that not even the items with prices next to them are actually available at the present time, that you begin to realise what you're getting into. The more experienced diner realises that whatever you order you're quite likely to get something else anyway.

Any attempts at smiling or trying to communicate, let alone politely complain, are met with a total lack of response. Perseverance on your part results in the word "Intourist" being muttered like an oath under the breath until eventually the waitress round on you with a string of what you can only assume is Russian abuse as all the Soviet diners find this amusing.

A further ten minutes of sitting waiting for service and you are suddenly shouted at to move to another section of the restaurant, your section having "closed" while you sat there. Movement to another table, unescorted, but in the general direction of the waiter's vague wave, leads to another ten minutes' wait, and eventually being moved to a third table by another irate waiter.

You have now reached the far end of the restaurant and although the waiter here seems keen to send you back again, he contents himself by serving everyone who arrives after you, and ignoring your attempts to order. The first course arrives an hour after you entered. Upon leaving, the trick, which I learned later is usual, is to have no change in the restaurant. This means either resigning yourself to another long wait or rounding the cost of the meal up to the nearest value rouble note you have with you.

The conclusion that can be drawn from my early days of tourism in the USSR is that if Intourist actually *wants* visitors to enjoy their holidays, and perhaps even encourage people to visit in greater numbers, then they must train hotel, restaurant and Beriozka staff in the art of being nice to guests. Just a small smile would do, even a neutral rather than antagonistic attitude would be better than nothing. They may not have much motivation for this, but perhaps they should be



more aware of the constitutional clause hanging over their heads, reminding them of their duty to promote peace. Thanks to Intourist policy their staff form the majority of Soviets that a foreign tourist will meet. It would be very easy for such people to return home convinced that all they were told about the Soviet Union is true—that it really is miserable, unfriendly, bureaucratic—and **NOTHING ELSE**.

In this section I have related the *worst* experiences I had in restaurant, Beriozka and telephone communication. Most other attempts held only a part of each bad experience. **BUT** the point is that these are the things that people will remember and relate when they arrive home. No amount of rapid tours of superb museums and brilliant shows will iradicate this image. People can remain on "Level 2" of international communication even after a visit to the USSR.

It is as if Intourist is deliberately working with the Western media to give an adverse image of the Soviet Union.

It is perhaps because it is so difficult to communicate across international lines that it means so much to be able to talk honestly, just face to face, man to man, woman to woman. Whatever. Once it has been decided to sit down and talk there is something in the human mind that allows you to know whether you can communicate. Some people are perhaps destined to be suspicious of people from different, especially "opposed" cultures. It is sad for those people.

As I travelled I met many people who were very serious and exact in their answers. I met others who made everything into a huge joke. Every different meeting was valuable in its own way. All such meetings were outside the Intourist structure, but not all were pre-arranged. Often going out for a walk alone I was accosted by people, not always just interested in my buying them something from Beriozka or selling a tape or T-shirt, some just wanted to practise their English. So then we just talked about anything and there was no more rewarding feeling.

I met students, nearest to my own age, with my own ideals. Not many have made it into this book, but they helped me enjoy my trip the most. Smiling, friendly and open in Lenin-grad, Irkutsk, and the "Young Company" in Khabarovsk who plied me with endless chocolates and cups of coffee. Such very basic communication, without barriers real or imagined, is what could make the world a better place.

Equally important was when older men who had fought in the war with the British and other Western nations sat me down and told me their life stories. Their was a relief for them in talking to me, simply saying that our nations were friends then, so why not now? Because of the barriers they could not say it otherwise, before now, direct face to face and follow it with a bear hug.

It is greatest thing that simple human communication can beat every single piece of history, geography, politics, bureaucracy. It is the key to life. Once this communication has been made, then you have arrived in the USSR.

**PART TWO.**

**DISCUSSION BETWEEN BRITAIN AND THE USSR**

## TALKING TO TEACHERS

I am from a teaching family; both my parents and one of my sisters are teachers—all work in primary schools (children aged 4-5 to 11). On my travels round the USSR I visited kindergartens, schools and institutes of further education. I am delighted to say that teachers are absolutely identical characters in both countries, as indeed they were from one end of the USSR right across the nation. Sitting in a staff room of a school in Leningrad I was quickly transported back to the schools where my parents teach, the atmosphere is identical.

There are few "career groups" that are so totally the same. I met a theatre company in Khabarovsk, excellent people full of life and fun, and they too reminded me very much of their equivalents that I have met in Britain—"The smell of the grease-paint." It was the same with teachers—"The smell of the chalk" (and children?).

It was an interesting contradiction to the lawyers and doctors I met, who were so different from their counterparts back home—usually for the better, that is less pompous. On the other hand shop assistants and waiters, as I have said, turned out poorly compared to those at home (they were often a sort of inverted snob). Generalisations, of course, and just my point of view.

Teachers invariably seem eager, friendly; they study you keenly, they are encouraging when you talk. This side of their professional character—to bring out the best in other people—is always present. With the actors it was similar, although here I felt I was being studied—perhaps they could use the character of a balding, uncertain and rather pessimistic young man from England in one of their productions!

Well, I shall introduce some of the teachers I talked to. The first school was in Leningrad. School No. 185, to be

exact, which was chosen because it specialises in teaching English, although like all Soviet schools it teaches the full range of statutory subjects. All children study these, there are no options until higher education or vocational training begins round about the sixteen-year-old mark. The subjects taught from age eleven are maths, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, technical drawing, art, music, geography, English, Russian, Russian literature, history, social studies, Soviet Law, physical education and astronomy.

There may be more—the head teacher, Elvira Gnesk was trying to list them all from the top of her head. Students are not allowed to select subjects that appeal to them most, but study them all. Soviet teachers' opinion of this system was generally mixed, most stressing the importance of having a well-rounded education, but also recognising the obvious problem that children who have no interest or talent in a particular area, still have to keep studying a topic. Since I returned home I have heard of moves to bring down the total number of subjects. However, the policy of no streaming in Soviet schools was much more fiercely defended. The opinion of teachers was that streaming is bad and this led to frequently voiced denouncements of even the comprehensive schools in Britain's state system.

The successes of not streaming at all in the USSR are based upon the whole educational philosophy, which is the same policy of public morality throughout life for the Soviet citizen. This means that, ideally, the stronger pupils in each discipline actually help the weaker ones, so that together individuals can learn to the best of their ability for the collective good of the state. Good pupils, like good workers are rewarded by having their photographs displayed in public under the "Worker of the Week" caption, or similar. You get these instead of advertising or the notorious nude girl on Page 3 in *The Sun*. The effect on the reader/viewer is correspondingly different as you might imagine.

Back in your Soviet school you'll be interested to know (especially children) that there has never been any corporal punishment. Yevgeny Pashkov, a history teacher at a 2,000 pupil secondary school in Irkutsk explained this, "We've never had corporal punishment in schools. Our major aim is to establish a relationship between teacher and pupil. There can be no understanding each other if not. A major educational factor is 'co-operation' between teacher and

pupil. That is, 'I will teach if you will try to learn' and 'I will try to learn if you will teach.'

"There are two major aspects of discipline: persuading and convincing, with praise and encouragement. We try to exclude all forms of administrative interference and enforcement. We try to implement group commitment to ideas."

The practical upshot of these long words is that the kids are very good in class. I had "administrative interference" retranslated and this came out as "punishment and ultimately expulsion"—something Mr. Pashkov could not remember happening at his school.

"It is important to penetrate deeply into the character and reach the mind, heart and soul of the child," he said, "then find out the best way to educate."

It seemed that he had been quite successful. I arrived in the middle of the school holidays and was surprised to find children outside digging the yard and mopping the stairs.

"Do they run the school themselves?" I asked. Yevgey explained, "The school year is over but the children are working for a period of time in their summer holidays, so they come to school in small groups."

"Other children are here because they go on walks around the region. Some more are retaking exams. Many children are at Pioneers' Camp but there are not enough places, so the rest of the school stay in urban Pioneers' Camp under school management. They eat and sleep here, in camp."

It was true, classrooms were laid out with mattresses on the floor, the school was open day and night throughout the long three months summer holiday that Russian children enjoy, spending a part of it at American-style summer camps, with only a very small cost to their parents. School holidays and daily hours were explained to me by Elvira Gnesk and her associate Irina Grigorieva back at school No. 185 in Leningrad.

"Children have three months' holiday in the summer, less a fortnight of community work agreed in the new school reforms, then two weeks at New Year and a week in spring and autumn. Most children start aged six and attend from 9 a. m. until 1 p. m., with morning exercises at 8. 45. After age 9 they stay until 2 p.m. then after age 12 till 3 p. m. But there are clubs after school for most, and homework. School is six days a week, Monday to Saturday."

Elvira commented that she thought the school hours should

be rethought a little, and that at the present time there was not enough emphasis on, or time for, sports. Apart from summer camps the Soviet system also resembles the US in its grading system (fifth grade, eighth grade etc.) and that if a child fails an exam he stays down. Apparently this rarely happens; most children survive summer retakes. The vast majority pass exams the first time—spurred on by fear of missing precious holiday time.

I asked my parents their opinion about the grading system, which doesn't exist in Britain of course.

*Catherine Thorne*: "I would think the grading system would have to be used with great sensitivity so that less academic children are not dogged by a sense of failure early in life and clever children are not limited by low expectations. We often seem to expect the less able child to work much harder than the naturally clever ones. The general aim should be for pupils to work hard for their own interest and satisfaction. An aura of competition where the same children always lose doesn't encourage that."

*Derek Thorne*: "There is something in the USSR-USA grade system. That is, it may be a very good thing to allow non-academic youngsters to leave school when nothing more can be achieved."

At the Khabarovsk Teachers Training Institute is the Far East, Galina Misjura expressed a knowledge of *Adrian Mole*, whilst *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was described as "marvellous". Other popular writers on the East coast included Graham Greene, Iris Murdoch, Somerset Maugham (everywhere), J. B. Priestley, Waugh, Golding and Peter Ustinov—who must be one of the few men genuinely popular around the globe, as indeed he deserves.

English language films were also used as teaching resources. While I was there the horrific American nuclear war film *The Day After* was shown across the nation. Otherwise movies mentioned seemed to be mostly dramatisations of nineteenth century novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*. I sadly failed to find anyone who had heard of *Star Trek*, *Monty Python* or other great institutions. Even Walt Disney and Mary Poppins left blank faces. I did run into a chap from Leningrad on holiday in Sochi who had bought black market videos of *Police Academy* and had even seen *Police Academy 3* which was only just out on video in Britain at the time. He was delighted when I told him that num-

ber 4 was soon to be released in the cinemas. He also told me he was a great Jack Nicholas fan.

But I digress again... back to school. This must be why I failed some of my exams when I was there!

There was more agreement among secondary school teachers of the probable benefits of a system that does not currently exist in Europe, America or the USSR. That is, to compel young people to take a year away from school after their final examinations, if they plan to go on to further education. This period should serve to give them a chance to experience a little outside reality in the big wide world. It would also provide time to gain a better idea of what they want to do in later life, perhaps spending some time in the career of their choice before going on to higher education in the relevant subjects.

This system already operates to some extent with young American and Soviet men who spend two years or so on national service, and of course in Britain we have training schemes or unemployment for the majority of school leavers, which has a similar effect!

Seriously though, the Youth Training Scheme in Britain is matched by vocational training in the USSR. Young people who are not going on to further education have the opportunity to experience work in the various fields they might enter. The obvious difference is that Soviet children have a motivation that British children do not—a guaranteed job at the end of training.

Entry to higher education in the USSR lies, as in most countries, mainly through passing final exams. These final exams, I am told, resemble our own in that children are encouraged to form logical argument by quoting from established critics and sources. Literature at this stage is used purely as exam matter, and not studied directly for its own worth, whereas in higher education there is more encouragement to develop arguments more widely and question existing ideas, so long as they have some logical basis.

Teaching of Marxism and Communist Theory continues right through the educational process. In higher education there are many mature students, frequently following part-time or correspondence courses, whilst in employment. Full-time students are guaranteed accommodation in hostels, sometimes in dormitories but mainly in double rooms. One floor in most blocks is specifically for young families, and there are child care centres.



One other good idea worth mentioning is the miniature street lay-out in each school yard, complete with traffic lights; very useful for road safety training, especially in the USSR. There may be fewer vehicles and wider roads, but traffic laws appear rather vague, with cars overtaking on all sides and not over-keen on stopping at red lights when it could be avoided. Much like drivers in continental Europe, in fact.

I asked some specific questions about teaching. These now follow, with quoted dialogue.

*Firstly,*

"What is the ratio of men to women in schools and do you think there is any evidence to suggest men or women make better teachers?"

*Galina Misjura:*

"Well, in our school there are 17 women and two men. I don't think it is a good thing, but the number of men seems to be increasing. There are a number of different sides to the problem, one thing is that the salary is low. We are training future language students here, there are three male students among 60 female. I do not think there is any difference between male and female teachers as a rule, it depends on the individual."

*Derek Thorne:*

"Statistics exist but are seldom available. My impression is that women outnumber men in primary schools (5 to 11 years) and men outnumber women in secondary schools. There is no evidence that men or women make better teachers. Teaching is an individual skill and you could well find examples of superb women teachers and awful men. Then look elsewhere and the reverse is true."

*Catherine Thorne:*

"There are far more women than men in primary education. I don't think women or men make better teachers. There is an imbalance in primary education, however, in that the majority of class teachers are women, but far more men become Headteachers or Deputies. I think this is at least partly due to the break many women have to raise their families at a crucial stage in their own careers and promotion prospects. Even if they take maternity leave and continue teaching they are unlikely to seek promotion, involving extra work, while their children are young. Where there are female Headteachers they are often unmarried or childless."

*Question:* "Are there enough teachers?"

*Nelly Serkova:*

"No, we have a shortage of teachers in the Soviet Union."

(*Author's note: All the children of Britain spontaneously cry, "You can have ours!"*)

*Derek Thorne:*

"There are not enough teachers in Britain, though there are plenty unemployed. The greatest advance in state education would be achieved by small classes and this depends on the number of teachers. "The official ratio of staff to children has always been misleading, they include school principals who rarely teach, part-time staff and so on. The real ratio is about 36 children to each teacher, though the official figures manage to make it about 22 to 1."

*Yevgeny Pashkov:*

"Up to the 8th form (age 14) the average is 35, after that it is 30. We're seeking to reduce this to 20-25 in a class but there is a shortage of teachers. If there were more teachers the level of education would improve."

*Elvira Gnesk:*

"There are not enough teachers, it is a problem for us."

*Catherine Thorne:*

"No, there are not enough teachers. The opportunity to improve ratios when the number of children fell a few years ago was ignored. Training was cut and teachers were encouraged to retire early. The object was to save money, not improve standards. "The ratio seems to be getting worse; it's generally over 30 children to each teacher, except in inner city areas where extra teachers are employed. It would be nice if it was about 20-25 children. In private schools there are about ten. Unstreamed, all-ability classes presuppose individual teaching, which is impossible with such large numbers."

In most schools I visited in the Soviet Union I asked, just for the record, the view of teachers there on the concept of private education. Of course the system was universally regarded as grossly unfair and rejected as one of the worst sides of capitalism. As one teacher put it, "It's one thing having the money to buy a nice home and high quality goods, but it is something else to be able to buy power for your children, when they have no more real ability than any other child."

My parents both teach in state schools. The views of my parents on private education are as follows:

*Catherine Thorne:*

"I'm ambivalent when it comes to private education. People should be able to spend their money as they wish. But the classes in private schools are smaller, which is a major advantage. Some schools are selective, accepting only gifted or highly intelligent children, who also have an advantage. (Similar to the Soviet sports schools—*P. J. T.*)

"Private schools produce people who consider themselves superior to others and perpetuate the old school tie/old boy network way of life. There is easier access to University and high-ranking jobs in public life. The answer is to raise the standards and improve the teacher/pupil ratio in state schools."

(*Author's note:* It is a difficult decision for parents who, however strongly opposed to private education as a concept, recognise it will give their child a better start in life.)

*Derek Thorne:*

"Private education is unfair because it is only available to the rich, and unsatisfactory because many private schools have very poor standards, educationally. The effect is that universities are filled with "rich kids" with no knowledge of real life or working people."

*Question:* "In the Soviet Union children appear to be indoctrinated with communism from an early age, coupled with instilling memories of sacrifice and victories in the Great Patriotic War. In Britain there is some comparison with religious teaching from an early age. What are your opinions on this?"

*Yevgeny Pashkov:*

"Firstly, we give our children political information so that they can understand fully what is going on in the country and in the world. In order to deliver political and domestic information about world events it is important to understand the situation. Display and information help children to understand political and ideological problems.

"The fact is that we believe communist morality is one of the highest standards of human morality—a high ideologically moral education for children by means of books and the teaching of good values in humane creative relationships. The major thing is that they understand all these principles are part and parcel of entire human values of co-existence on this planet."

*Question:* "But isn't the association, communist-good, capitalist-bad promoted?"

"There is no feeling of superiority about it. We do not try to confront our ideologies with universal human values. On the contrary, it is our belief that communist morality is the successor to humanists and mankind throughout the centuries. "Thus it generates respect for all the good, creative and valuable things that have been sponsored by other nations. So the task is to be the descendants of the best knowledge and experience of the old nations."

*Question:* "So communist teaching is the coming together of the positive aspects of human history?"

"We are not cosmopolitan. We live in a communist nation. Socialism and communism combine therefore and we should learn how to build up our own society. At the same time we educate our children to understand all human values.

"Our citizen is the comprehensive owner of the country, but our country is part of the planet. We think it is our main task to educate children with regard to understanding that we live on an earth which is home to all humanity. We should do our best to survive and help save the world from catastrophe. So we should think over how best to support life and guarantee life for future generations. The outlook is typical of communists throughout the world; we just teach our people to understand comprehensive problems."

... And back to the original question for the responses from England.

*Catherine Thorne:*

"It's difficult not to indoctrinate something, I suppose, or people grow up with no sense of values. Most teachers in England make strenuous efforts NOT to impose their own ideals and beliefs on the children in their charge. A multi-cultural approach is encouraged in Britain, that is a knowledge and respect for other people's beliefs and ways of life. The form this takes obviously varies with the age of the children concerned, and also whether the Local Council is Conservative or Labour controlled.

"The morning assembly still takes place in most schools I believe. Whenever polls are taken parents overwhelmingly want their children to have religious education. The new standard curriculum that will eventually be introduced also contain religious education."

*Derek Thorne:*

"Religious education is increasingly broadly based. It is not wholly Christian and often mainly moral. My view of

the Russian system is that, given their past history, their approach makes sense."

As I said at the beginning of this section, teachers are teachers. It is quite reassuring. I met exact models of the people who taught me, from the hard disciplinarians to those who controlled children with a mastery of satire. Ivan Leonov, the very kindly gentleman from Aurora Publishers who showed me round Leningrad, told me one evening that he had trained as a teacher before the war. Though he had only taught for a short time a group of his former pupils organised a get-together at which Ivan was guest of honour. The students were by then all lecturers and directors themselves and of course it made Ivan very happy. It was that sort of incident that all the teachers I met spoke of as their greatest reward.

"Teachers are fortunate in having constant job satisfaction (as well as frequent disappointments!) From observing a child who couldn't count, solve a simple mathematical problem, to meeting a successful ex-pupil who appreciates the help he received in your class, the feeling of satisfaction never wanes", was a typical response.

"Meeting pupils twenty years on as my equals", was another.

Teachers also united in their feelings that they were made the scapegoats for unsuccessful ideas from controlling boards and authorities. Parents who thought their children should receive more individual treatment were also universally resented. My mother summed up a feeling which seems to be global, if perhaps experienced more strongly in some countries than others, "Problems certainly arise these days from broken homes, and some parents seem to expect schools to cater for their child only."

Some teachers in Leningrad thought problems would be solved if texts were made more universal, as children arriving from different areas and brought up on different books found it difficult to readjust and fell behind in the grading system. This is interesting to teachers in England who value the amount of autonomy they have in schools and resent government proposals to introduce a National Curriculum.

Many British teachers bitterly resent the Government's blanket criticism of schools, which has lowered morale among them. My parents and their contemporaries maintain that standards in schools are much higher than when they

started teaching thirty years ago, despite comments to the contrary from the media...

But whatever the problems, all teachers seemed to be happy with their work and devoted to their careers. At least those who had been in it for a few years. All acknowledged the importance of international contact and said that this should be increased. I am told that British schools television is improving in this direction, whilst several Soviet schools I visited had International Clubs frequently named after American schoolgirl "Little Miss Peace" Samantha Smith, who was killed in a plane crash in 1985. The higher education establishments also organised exchanges from the USSR, but unfortunately these are limited by the currency problem.

I'll leave the closing quote with my father, from whom I have perhaps inherited the pessimistic side of my character.

*Derek Thorne:*

"It's a futile hope, but I just want my former pupils always to respect others and to value peace. I hope that children now and in the future will be born and grow up in a world of peace, mutual tolerance, respect, and general prosperity."

## TALKING TO THE PEACE MAKERS

*"Go to Moscow with an open mind wanting to know what's happening, and you come back with an open mind, wanting to know what's happening. You learn something—but it is such an extensive process in such a large country.*

*"...On the international stage, we're seeing the vision and energy needed to create the opportunity to end the arms race and achieve real change in global politics. Perhaps 'New thinking' can achieve what the peace movement alone could not."*

*Sanity Magazine, July 1987*

The Peace Building in Moscow is a medium-sized office block. It differs from most in that it has an art gallery full of peaceful works of art on the ground floor; and the lady who tends the cloakroom smiles at you. On this particular afternoon my cloak was the only one in it, but a tag was handed out and checked on my return to avoid confusion.

At the top of the Peace Building sits Genrikh Borovik, famous Soviet author, playwright and now unpaid president of the Soviet Peace Committee. Heavily built, with middle-age spread pushing through his smart grey suit, he is a man who would look at home on any British board of directors. From across the desk he studies the 23-year-old British writer, who must appear distinctly untidy.

Mr. Borovik is clearly unsure of the situation but, speaking good English (he travels widely promoting the Peace Committee) he launches into a long description of just what his committee does. It isn't quite CND.

"We organise the promotion of world peace and co-ordinate the will for peace in the Soviet Union. We have many millions of supporters.

"We organise international peace conferences. We've helped to establish permanent exchange children's summer camps in the USA and here. We put on plays, publish books, organise art displays and pop concerts. There is much more we hope to do, mutual projects with the USA and other Western countries to increase understanding and so promote peace."

"But in terms of nuclear policy, do you put pressure on your government, point out flaws and suggest improvements in policy? Surely the millions of people who make up your membership have different ideas on the best way to promote peace?"

"Why should we campaign against our government? Our government wants peace. We are the centre of the people's conscience, pushing the government to fulfil the nation's ideal, as well as being part of it. Another thing we have done is ban all war propaganda in the USSR. At the moment we are trying to have sales of toy guns to children stopped."

This is one of the things that Western tourists find hard to understand, with weaponry all over the country and murals of victorious soldiers—memories of victory in the Great Patriotic War. Newly married couples traditionally pose next to the local war victory memorial (often a tank, weapon launcher, etc); children parade with weapon in ceremonial defence of such monuments; older male children wear uniforms no-stop for two years in National Service. The pro-peace propaganda seems as much anti-imperialist in its nature, imperialism and peace cannot coexist.

To the Soviet mind it is belief in the state of almost religious proportions, but with much more practical logic. "The state and government are us, why should it go against us?" they think. To the outside mind it appears to be a fanatical love of the instruments of warfare. They would never guess that here toy-guns are banned (or soon would be), the impression is of a mainly military state.

Capitalists have a saying "Better dead than red" (at least the more stupid capitalists do, those who would certainly sell their souls rather than die). It seems the Soviets would prefer death to the imposition of a different political system. "Better dead than capitalist." It doesn't have the same ring



to it, but in terms of reality is more likely to be adhered to by the person saying it.

I asked Mr. Borovik how he thought the Peace Committee was received in other countries (I for one, had never known it existed).

"It depends by whom we are seen. The American president doesn't like us much but I think the majority of people do. Just reasonable people, church leaders for example. Reasonable people who really want peace.

"We send groups to the United States and other countries to answer questions, we receive groups from these countries to answer ours. But on the question of peace I think the whole society is pro-peace. It is written into our constitution.

"It is impossible for us to make money on a war or in preparing for a war. We have a proverb, 'A beautiful small war is always good for the USA.' For us it is always a loss of money, a loss of people."

"But surely the Soviet government sells arms throughout the world?"

"The selling of arms is an international trade, unfortunately. Let's stop it. Let us disarm. First of all let's eliminate nuclear armaments and then all weaponry. It is possible. We need it now, worldwide."

At this point we got into discussions about Afghanistan and imperialist intervention, which you will find reproduced at the end of this section. Though Mr. Borovik was adamant that imperialism was responsible for virtually all the world's problems, he finished by saying;

"I wouldn't like to say that we are saints. We have made terrible mistakes, firstly in our own country. But we learn from these mistakes and move forward."

Sadly our meeting ended at this point. Mr. Borovik being a very busy man I never had the opportunity to ask him what the terrible mistakes were? I have only read of things that are now admitted could have been better considered, though no one could have known at the time, how things would develop. For example the deployment of SS-20s or the move into Afghanistan.

The Soviet claim that they could not make money out of war was the same answer I was given by everyone I asked as to why I should believe that they wanted peace and that the West did not (not that I doubted their claims any more than I doubt those of my own countrymen, it is just a shame

that governments can't just pack up their bombs and leave their populations in peace, rather than looking for confrontation as they do now.)

However, the economic question of gains from war, financially, is an interesting one. Novosti have this to say: "The lust for profit fogs the brain, muffles the voice of reason and prods one to undertake risky ventures. The English writer T. J. Dunning observed in the middle of the last century that at 300 per cent profit there is no crime that capital would not risk, even at peril of the gallows... But nowadays the owners of munitions corporations such as McDonnell Douglas Boeing get up to 500 per cent net profit. The Star Wars scheme promises even more. This is where it is necessary to look for the origins of the present mad arms race and international tension."\*

Novosti goes on to explain that though such profiteers make up less than one per cent of the population, they have control of the media. Novosti also points out that the first Soviet school lesson each year is on peace, the promoting of hatred of other countries is illegal (though some posters of life in the US I saw weren't exactly fair, let alone accurate for the majority. It's just hatred of political systems practised by other nations that is promoted).

The attitude of the European and particularly the British to the "world situation" regarding nuclear weaponry is closely related to our social, economic and historical position.

At the time of writing, slightly more than half of the population agree with Britain having an independent nuclear deterrent. Many of these people are from the older and more influential generations in our society, people who are unable to accept that Britain is no longer a military world power, as it was only 40 years ago. These people are doubly convinced that "negotiating from strength" is important and that the reason for the US/USSR agreement on one class of nuclear weaponry is a result of Britain's nuclear arsenal. Just to make their case stronger they're about to invest in a few more missiles. As journalist Paul Anderson wrote in an article examining the problems Labour's unilateral defence policy caused the party in the election, "Britain is no longer a world power—it is a medium-sized European power—and it is well

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\* *USSR. 100 Questions and Answers*, Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, Moscow, 1986, p. 103

past time for giving up the delusions of imperial grandeur that the British 'independent deterrent' represents."\*

On the other hand many people, again especially from the older generations, have a similar attitude to the Soviet one. That is that in the last war they lost a great deal through being comparatively weak. Though Britain was never invaded the argument is that, if we lose our independent strength, in the event of another war (this time with the Soviets) we should have no defence. In other words that we cannot rely on NATO and the Americans for protection.

This is the argument Mrs. Thatcher puts forward as the reason "why, nuclear weapons maintain peace, while everyone is strong, no one will dare attack each other."

And assurances by the Novosti Agency that the presence of Britain's independent deterrent is a waste of our resources and only complicates the nuclear disarmament process, is seen by those in favour of Britain's deterrent as a spider inviting a fly to land on its web.

There is another dimension to the nuclear weapons dilemma, however, as Britain is base to both American nuclear and conventional forces. First there are the cruise missiles sited across Western Europe to match Soviet deployment of SS-20s in the Eastern bloc of countries. Many people were opposed to the deployment of these in Britain. The majority of the population, in fact. There seems to be a degree of contradiction in official statements that we need the independent deterrent, but that we also need to be a launch pad for American missiles in exchange for American support. If we have American protection why do we need an independent protector, and if we have an independent protector, why do we need the American missiles on our soil, drawing us in?

These are the technicalities of Britain's nuclear position, but the relationship with the Americans and the Soviet Union is interesting.

The relationship with America is very much a love/hate one. It cuts right through every level of our society. American tourists in Britain are well known for their loudness and crassness—superficialities of character. These are generalisations, of course, there are plenty of lovely, intelligent Americans, it is just that American tourists lay themselves

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\* *Tribune*, No. 29, July 17, 1987

open to satire. They also spend an awful lot of money, and for that they are grudgingly welcomed by envious Brits. It is similar to the way Intourist grabs money from foreign guests in the Soviet tourist industry, except that we try to be a little more subtle about it and "smile as we steal".

On a historical level, the American rise to wealth, fame and super-power status is again envied by Britain. The most famous example of this concerns the last war. Although they only came in towards the end, after the British and Russians had fought for years, the Americans seem to behave as though they alone won it. So gratitude for their support is given grudgingly.

And so it is with US missiles based on British soil, missiles over whose use Britain has little control, as Mrs. Thatcher has had to admit. Public anxiety is raised for many reasons. A few years ago, for example, a high-ranking American Government official talked of the possibility of having "a limited nuclear war in Europe", which roused the fears of those already dubious of America's dedication to Europe if it came to saving its own skin (not that a nuclear war in Europe wouldn't have profound and probably terminal effects on the global climate anyway). In addition to this, the whole Rambo gun-shooting cowboy image of the Reagan administration leads a lot of people to ask, "Just what sort of people does the future of the world depend on?"

However, the British Government still emphasises Britain's "special relationship" with the United States. A recent satirical sketch portrayed a conversation between two puppets—one representing the British Defence Minister and supposed "Yes Man" George Younger, and the other the American Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger. "George Younger" was trying to emphasise the "special relationship" and work out how Britain benefits. It went like this:

"So Mr. Weinberger, Caspar... Caspy, me old mate, what's the deal?"

"Well, Younger...."

"Er, George, please."

"Well, Younger, you help us with Star Wars, support the policy and develop the technology...."

"Right, right. Star Wars, lovely. Good, good, yes."

"You continue to provide bases for our airborne and land-based missiles."

"Missiles... right, right, double right, good."

"You buy Trident."

"Yes we will."

"And accept a stronger dollar and high interest rates."

"Accepted... no problem. Anything else?"

"...Well, you could do my laundry...."

"Fine, laundry, right."

"Pick up my groceries, take the kids to school."

"Groceries, kids, right."

"Return my library books, wash the car, vacuum the carpet."

"Carpet...right, lovely, good."

"Water the plants and feed the dog."

"Feed the dog. Good, well that doesn't sound unreasonable considering our special relationship, Caspy. So considering our special relationship, what do we get in return?"

"Erm...nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing at all, that's why it's so special."

"Oh good, good, right, I'm all for that."\*

But this resentful and plain jealous feelings towards America does not move the feelings of the British people dramatically towards support of the USSR. True enough, the increasing lack of trust in American policy, combined with the sudden emergence of Gorbachev and solid Soviet peace initiatives, which the White House appears to reject or ignore without good reason, has opened the minds of a lot of people, and is certainly improving the chances of peace.

If Gorbachev really is as good as his word, then his emergence may be not only a great thing for the Soviet Union but also for the world.

The catch comes in the phrase "really is as good as", because this is where suspicion lies. It seems that after decades of ignoring the rest of the world the Soviets have suddenly decided they want to be a part. After decades of competing in the arms race and contributing to the cold war the Soviets have suddenly started making huge initiatives that really show that they are more serious than the British and American governments about peace.

But the West is suspicious. Why the sudden change of policy? How long will it last? As long as the "Prague Spring"?

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\* Written by Jan Hislop and Nick Newman for the "Spitting Image" Production Company with thanks of the author.

Quite simply, the Soviets are not trusted; the reason for this is that all the power lies in the hands of a few men, who appear to change their minds whenever it suits them. No one, at present, is confident that "new thinking" is here to stay, that the dinosaurs might not suddenly regain power, push out Gorbachev and return to past attitudes. The lack of non-official groups critical of state policy, especially on the nuclear question, and the suppression of those who try to form such groups, is part and parcel of an attitude that people in the West do not trust.

As an example, a report in *Tribune* on the European Nuclear Disarmament Convention stated, "As recently as last December the Soviet Peace Committee attacked Western peace movements for arguing that the Soviet Union should not make a treaty on land-based intermediate-range nuclear missiles (INF) dependent upon Star Wars. Yet just two months later, Gorbachev himself dropped that condition."\*

Later, in the same article by Stephen Brow, and Jane Mayes, "'New thinking' appears to be an uneven process, however. In May, the Soviet Peace Committee welcomed a British END delegation led by Mary Kaldor. A senior SPC representative was quoted as saying that the SPC now thought along exactly the same lines as END. But two weeks previously the Committee was still distributing a booklet attacking the Moscow Trust group, Edward Thompson and END as imperialist agents."\*\*

Perhaps by the time this book is published greater understanding and unity will have been achieved under Gorbachev. But glasnost will really have to start working if suspicion is to decrease. Glasnost right the way up, as well as all the way down, not just in the nuclear argument but in all the problems this book mentions at all levels. There are currently too many inconsistencies and these must be explained or iradicated. The Soviet people I talked to understood this, but at the same time they could not understand why the West remained hostile when "all we want is peace."

Of course, as far as the Soviet people are concerned, they have always wanted peace, it is written into their constitution. The Soviets have no pro-war propaganda or films as in the West. It is also written in virtually every publication, pro-

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\* *Tribune*, July 17, 1987

\*\* *Ibidem*.

paganda or otherwise—and of course on the walls in huge letters. Not just peace mind, but “peace AGAINST the imperialists”.

Britain's major peace movement is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or CND. It has existed for more than 30 years and though it contains prominent members of political parties and religious representatives, it follows no particular political doctrine. Its current voluntary membership is in excess of a quarter of a million. One of its arguments is for unilateral disarmament in Britain—probably its most contentious aim in British society as a whole.

The origins of the group lay in opposition to the development of the British hydrogen bomb in the late 1950s. In 1954 the “H-Bomb National Campaign” collected a million signatures against the weapon. 1957 saw the establishment of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests. In 1958 CND was born. A policy statement was issued that Britain must “renounce unconditionally the use or production of nuclear weapons and refuse to allow their use by others in her defence...”

In 1961 mass sit downs were organised in protest; “civil disobedience” as this sort of behaviour is called. Publicity was huge as the government began arresting people before the demonstrations began. 1300 were arrested at the meeting in Trafalgar Square in London, and at Holy Loch, the base for submarines carrying nuclear weapons. Those arrested included CND's first president, 89-year-old Bertrand Russell.

Both the Labour and Liberal parties had unilateral nuclear disarmament policies and the government cancelled successive missile programmes. The famous mass marches to the Atomic Missile Factories in Aldermaston took place each Easter.

In 1963 the USA and USSR signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty ending nuclear tests in the atmosphere, though not underground.

In 1964 things began to change. CND's popularity began to wane, partly due to its own success. The Labour government elected on a promise not to buy Polaris missiles broke its word. Films demonstrating the possible effects of nuclear war were not shown on TV due to the fear of renewed public protest.

In 1976 CND was given a new impetus when the news broke that the Americans were developing a neutron bomb

that would kill people with minimum damage to buildings.

In 1979 anti-nuclear feeling was intensified by the decision to deploy Cruise missiles. By the time they arrived in 1983 the famous Greenham Common Peace Camp had been established for two years, and anti-nuclear fear snowballed.

In 1986 the bombing of Libya by US planes based in Britain caused a storm of protest, but it was the Chernobyl accident that led to the greatest public response, with 900 new members joining CND each week afterwards.

And so the situation remains today much as it always has: the majority of the population in Britain is still in favour of having some sort of nuclear deterrent, but CND is convinced that by "educating and persuading" they can convince everyone that their view is correct.

So there is some common sense there. I contacted CND's Press Officer, John Millner, with a few burning questions. To begin with, what was CND's view of the Soviet Peace Committee, and did they agree with its argument that it is the imperialists, especially the USA, who were to blame for the "world situation"?

"CND would certainly not agree that the Soviet Union's foreign policy is invariably defensive or that it always seeks to protect third world countries from imperialist intervention," he replied. "Historically, much of the blame for the cold war and the spiralling nuclear arms race must be shared by both the super powers."

In February 1987 Gorbachev told the Soviet Trade Unions' Congress that imperialism was using the arms race to starve the USSR of funds for its economic reform projects. Whilst the Brezhnev regime had stated that it would "take measures to ensure that the Soviet Military has everything it needs", Gorbachev has said that the Soviet Union should "not make a single step in excess of sensible, sufficient defence."

However, Western cynicism distrusts the peace statements from the Soviet Union. Gorbachev himself has indicated that what appears to be a very intelligent move in terms of defusing the arms race, and indeed the whole new thinking/openness ideal is not directly inspired by a love for peace, but is in fact directly related to fears for the Soviet economy. Suspicious Westerners claim that if the Soviet economic matters WERE in good shape, then their government would not be so intent on new peace initiatives. Others who are des-



perate about the state of the world consider that any move is a good move and say "who cares why?"

The section in the leaflet, "Does CND link peace with other issues?" says, "In Britain, while the government spends large sums on weapons, our health, education and other essential services are starved of funds. There is increasing evidence that even if the bombs never fall, our future is threatened by the production alone of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. The earth's atmosphere, the oceans and the soil are being polluted by increasing levels of radiation, which causes a variety of fatal diseases in human beings."

Over the years the Soviet Peace Committee and CND have had a varying relationship. At the time of writing the Peace Committee seemed keen to forge links with Western disarmament groups, but what was the CND position? John Millner: "Our view of the Soviet Peace Committee—and of all the official peace committees in Eastern Europe—is that they are essentially instruments of state policy. As organisations concerned about peace and working for disarmament, we have regular contacts with them, sometimes agreeing, often disagreeing with their positions. But we believe that these contacts are no substitute for a free flow of information, people and ideas between independent, non-aligned groups, such as make up the peace movement in Western Europe. Genuine detente between East and West can only come about when independent peace groups in the Soviet bloc (such as the Moscow Trust Group in the USSR) are able to campaign openly and freely, just as CND is."

— Bar the arrests and banning of unsuitable TV adverts. Or was that Greenpeace? So the CND line is in some respects similar to the traditional, conservative British one of seeing the Soviet's bad points as virtually the only thing that counts, when it comes to detente.

The Moscow Trust Group is a small, independent group reorganised after members were harrassed, arrested, or left the country. Following a suggestion by CND and the Australian Peace Organisation (People for Nuclear Disarmament), the group were allowed to send one member to a Soviet Peace Committee's Information Meeting in Moscow to talk about humanitarian questions. They comment:

"It still takes courage for people to get together outside the accepted bodies of state and society, to discuss and organise. And it is amazing how open, hospitable

and light of spirit the members of the Trust Group are."

But the Trust Group and CND are thought of as imperialist agents by many people at all levels of Soviet society,—just as CND (and probably the Trust Group) are regarded as tools of the Kremlin by many people in Britain. In fact, the political paranoia is such that anyone raising an issue which they consider transcends politics, and trying to see both sides of the argument (whether successfully or not) is open to accusations in the Soviet Union of being imperialist agents and either Soviet propagandists or—more degradingly—"brainwashed" by the Soviets, in the West.

At home and in the USSR I have been accused of all this, and I suspect it will be difficult to find a Western publisher for this book because it sets out Soviet points of view. Or perhaps I am too pessimistic about the British establishment and its publishing houses. Assuming Progress says "Yes" to publishing this book in English and other languages, it seems highly unlikely it could ever be published in Russian, as I realise its argumentative themes could be described as anti-Soviet by some. Or perhaps I have become too paranoid by what I have read in the Western press as to what is termed "anti-Soviet".

What is CND's reaction to allegations of Kremlin infiltration? I remember one British group, that claims to have evidence that this is the case, flying a light plane over areas where CND were holding demonstrations. It trailed a banner that reads 'KREMLIN SENDS THANKS'. In fact the group involved is anti-Soviet in a racist sense, arguing that capitalism is a "superior" system to socialism simply because they happen to think it is. Like the people who like to think blacks are better than white, men better than women.

*John Millner:*

"I think only extreme right-wing ideologies really believe CND are instruments of the Kremlin. No one has ever produced any evidence for KGB infiltration—though there is plenty to prove that we are infiltrated and spied upon by our own security services. CND is totally committed to the democratic process. We believe that only the force of public opinion can bring about the adoption by Britain of a non-nuclear defence policy, and that the public will only adopt such a view when we have succeeded in persuading them that such a defence policy can better defend our democracy than the threat of nuclear suicide."

Incidentally, CND is opposed to NATO and the Warsaw Pact because they are nuclear alliances, and campaigns for Britain's withdrawal from NATO whilst this is the case.

However, I will leave the final comments of the Soviet's view of British nuclear defence to the Soviet international news magazine *New Times*. Of course, it is up to you whether or not you agree with their correspondents. Alexander Lebedev, the associate editor states:

"Independent steps towards nuclear disarmament by Britain could have tremendous political impact. We certainly don't understand unilateral nuclear disarmament as an intention to disarm Britain, or to put at risk its national security. Nobody wants that and nobody expects that. But some steps, which would really lead to curbing, if not stopping the nuclear arms race through some unilateral measures, would very much encourage us to look for new solutions, perhaps for reducing conventional arms. It could also discourage other countries that are striving now for nuclear weapons. The political impact would be great, while actually the military balance on the side of the West wouldn't be jeopardised."

Mrs. Thatcher would not agree, and what the Soviets call her "nuclearphilia" led to the placement by the Conservative Party shortly before the British Election in June '87, of full page newspaper advertisements announcing: "NUCLEAR ARMS HAVE KEPT THE PEACE FOR 40 YEARS IN EUROPE", followed by words to the effect that doing away with them would leave Britain open to Soviet attack (obviously the "special relationship" with America would fall through as soon as we asked them to point their missiles across the Bering Straits and leave us out of it—after all, the world is round.)

Still, it was the Soviets who introduced the SS-20s to Europe in the first place. The deployment of Cruise was mainly a political step to ensure Europe was involved in US policy. In Sochi I bought a copy of the pre-election *Times* with the advertisement in, about a fortnight after the election (news travels fast in the USSR!) We all had a good laugh about the advert, sad though it was to imagine how many people read it, didn't think about it, yet agreed with it.

The other *New Times* comment comes from Vladimir Orel, first vice-president of the Soviet Peace Committee.

"Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain recently paid an official visit to the Soviet Union. The visit was

preceded, a week earlier, by a trip to Britain by a delegation from the Soviet Peace Committee... As we listened to the British Premier's statements in Moscow and compared them with our still fresh impressions of our discussions with the British, we could not help but draw the conclusion that there were two Britains—a Britain that clings to the nuclear warhead as if to a life buoy, and a Britain that sees its salvation in consigning the nuclear sword to the rubbish dump. A Britain still nostalgic for its bygone might and a Britain that seeks to assert its authority as a great power by setting a good example in disarmament.”\*

And then again...

*THE TRUTH ABOUT AFGHANISTAN ACCORDING TO  
GENRIKH BOROVIK OF THE SOVIET PEACE COMMITTEE*

“The history of Afghanistan is one of imperialist intervention. Between 1920 and 1940 the British supported rebels, during the war it was the Germans and since then the CIA.

“In 1975 the Afghan king was overthrown, there was no revolution. Then in 1976 a group of rebels came from Pakistan, financed by the CIA, to overthrow the new leader.

“The country was in a terrible situation, both politically and socially. When Nixon visited there he said the country should be maintained as a museum of the Middle Ages, 95 per cent of people were illiterate, 99 per cent of women. Some forces wanted to break down the feudal system, but we did nothing to support them.

“When the Afghan revolution came in 1978 the Americans were in the process of losing in Iran, and they put their support behind the rebels. By 1979 the rebels against the Afghan government were 30 per cent bigger than the Afghan army, the Afghan government asked the Soviet Union for support.

“They did this thirteen times (on an open telephone, so the Americans know this is true). Only on the fourteenth occasion did we agree, and we only did so because it looked like the Americans would take over and use it as an anti-Soviet base. Maybe they wouldn't have, but it looked like it at the time.

“We could not trust the Americans with a revolution

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\* *New Times*, No. 15, April 20, 1987, p. 3

on our own border. It was a hard decision at the time, whether it was a mistake or not we do not know. We want to pull out now, the Afghan government is stronger. It is a terrible thing when one Afghan is killing another. But now the Americans don't want us to pull out."

...Apart from Mr. Borovik's explanation of the reasons for the Afghan conflict, he pointed out that Western media never took up invitations to look at the Soviet position in Afghanistan.

Considering this, I remembered the many reports of heroic journalists crossing over from Pakistan with the rebels to bring back reports of how many Soviet planes and tanks they had destroyed with British-made weaponry.

I wrote to the BBC asking why they had never tried to examine the Soviet case, even if it were to be dismissed once examined. I didn't get a reply. (Though that shouldn't be taken as a damnation of the BBC—there was a similar non-reaction from *Moscow News* or TASS when I asked them questions.)

It is really quite amusing (in a sad sort of way) that so many people can form an entrenched opinion from only one side or the other of an argument. Or indeed from no side of an argument. They just form an opinion.

I know that in Britain there is a delusion that we have a free press and a neutral television network. Yet of course they are part of the patriotic ego-boosting propaganda industry. That sounds sinister, but in all countries the TV just reinforces the political and social ideologies.

What is farcical is that in Britain we suffer from a delusion that our TV is neutral in its reporting. I cannot say whether or not our TV, in general terms, is the best in the world, *but* I do agree with what Eduard Limonov said: "The only difference between the media in the West and in the Soviet Union is that in the West people suffer from the delusion that they have a 'free' media. In the USSR people know what they are told is controlled. Hence people in the USSR think more carefully about what they read (even if their upbringing only allows them to examine facts from one angle.) You can tell people in the West anything, and they will believe it."

An example of political influence on British TV occurred recently when Government ministers complained about coverage of the American bombing of Libya. They felt

that too much time (in terms of seconds) had been given to reports of suffering Libyans compared with film of Mr. Reagan explaining his reasons, or American planes, or something else less anti-British or anti-American. Such is the power of TV.

I'm too young to remember the Soviet move into Prague in 1968. I was just told of tanks rolling in to crush a happy upsurge of joy and freedom in the country. I asked history teacher Yevgeny Pashkov in Irkutsk for his account of that event and more general issues of international relationships.

"Firstly, what were the major causes of disagreement between East and West?"

"These are basically deep rooted into the histories of both societies, living under different social/economic and political systems which each cannot accept. The Soviets cannot accept interference and aggression in countries. It cannot be accepted in the future. The task of both sides is to find a way out of deadlocks and blind alleys so that we can find an escape for mankind rather than trying to impose our systems on everyone else."

"...Did he believe it was the Americans that did all the invading?"

"I think that besides the fact that US imperialism inspires interference in other countries, other capitalist countries interfere as well."

"...But not the USSR?"

"We also hold economic relations, but based on equality. We don't think we could try to impose our will of power on other nations because then we would not have our self respect."

"...So have things changed since the invasion of Prague in 1968?"

"I feel that fundamental principles of our policy are still the same. To render support and aid to friendly nations, or any states, countries or so on, when we believe they need our help."

"...But in Britain we were given the impression that the Czech leaders were quite happy, and the people likewise."

"We cannot prove that all Czechs were happy, but a certain group in Czechoslovakia tried to drive people away from the main course at that time. You understand that

capitalists remained healthy and alive, they were not interested in the process of construction of a socialist society in Czechoslovakia, but preferred to reintroduce capitalism.

When it became clear that there was no way back to capitalism these people tried to force a change of events in their favour. You can understand that a certain part of the population tried to take advantage of events and I feel that not all Czechs were happy at that time. So naturally enough the government applied to Warsaw Pact members, including the USSR. We do not like to interfere in the affairs of other countries, but in this event we had to."

"...Couldn't there have been elections in Prague?"

"There was not peace for a fair election. The capitalists had started firing."

"...So what do you see as the future of the world? Global communism or a combination of the better aspects of capitalism and socialism?"

"I would say that true harmony is a deep interaction of different interests. Secondly, we say that peaceful coexistence is a major part of the humane future of mankind. But whilst inequality in human rights and economic rights still exist in many countries, and there is starvation in third world countries, how can we speak of harmony in all things? Whilst inequality exists there can be no comprehensive harmony for mankind."

*"Crime, careerism and abuse of official positions for selfish purposes are far from having been uprooted under socialism."*

*USSR. 100 Questions and Answers, 1986*

The question of crime in the USSR is an interesting one. The criminals whose deeds fill the pages of Western newspapers are murderers, rapists, bank robbers and extremely wealthy businessmen whose wheeler-dealing has actually gone beyond the law. The USSR papers, *Novosti*, and Western sovietologists identify fraud, bribery and black marketeering as the Soviet Union's major problems. During my visit *Moscow News* published a full page detailing corruption in shops, with managers bribing suppliers to let them have more of the limited quantities of rare goods. Customers then bribed shop staff—who were short changing them anyway—to save them some of the scarce commodities.

Unfortunately the bribery and corruption is a part of Soviet life. Just as the fear of violent crime, rape, shoplifting and fare evasion is the product of capitalism.

When I was in Leningrad, a TV programme on the subject talked to school leavers who were going into retailing jobs. They hoped they would be able to avoid the corruption—but they thought it would be difficult as everyone else was. According to *Moscow News* the problem in retailing is vast; the majority of the millions of employees being involved in some form of bribery.

Black marketeering and the selling of goods at inflated prices are related and common crimes. Unlike Western-



style "black markets", products are not often stolen, just purchased illegally, and sold at a profit. Such capitalism is a crime in the USSR and serious cases result in imprisonment.

According to Western sources bribery is rife and inherent in Soviet society, a way of life as it were. Equality is enforced but human beings naturally cannot help wanting the best hospital care for loved ones, the best education for their children and so on. A bribe is "expected" by doctors, teachers, examiners, from those wanting entry into higher education and, more obviously, in business. Apart from the desire to obtain better services and material goods, production quotas enforced by the government are blamed. If a shop manager does not sell enough he is penalised; to sell enough he must have good produce to sell; to get good produce he must bribe. This system is supposed to be changing.

Probably the Western reports are exaggerated, but it is clearly a problem. Whilst everyone is theoretically equal, the actual standard of life is not high enough for many who can bribe or use personal influence for advantage.

Unfortunately there is corruption at the top, often covered up, (as it is everywhere I presume); but now being actively addressed by the Party, under glasnost, as is this sort of crime at every level of society. The problem is that, where there is massive corruption, it is impossible to punish everyone. So examples are made, unfortunate for those selected, but a warning to the rest. Gorbachev fights to improve things.

It is strange too that Western Sovietologists dwell a long time on the corruption and bribery (which must be accepted to some degree because even Novosti admits it), yet they have to dig down hard to fill a page with tales of violent crime. Murder, rape—they do happen, but it is possible to walk through a city centre park after dark, and see old couples sitting on benches and little children up late playing. There is no feeling of violence anywhere—unlike at home. When more open-minded Western journalists admit this absence of violent crime, the harsh penalties and huge police presence are cited as the main preventative reason.

I had spent six months before my visit in Tottenham, a suburb of London. I lived near a housing estate where

a mob had killed and tried to decapitate a policeman. We rarely went out after dark. I accompanied my girl-friend on visits to the chip-shop fifty yards away. I was walking across a park in Moscow at 11 p. m. when it suddenly struck me where I was, and that I would have walked miles to avoid such an eventuality in London.

Petty corruption, like drunkenness, is probably not much better in Britain than the USSR, I thought, it's just that we're so busy with the worse things that we don't notice such minor offences. After my visit I had two days in my home town, Nottingham—not an especially violent place on the whole—but on the first day I managed to see one “brave” man hitting a woman (not that I was man enough to do anything about it myself). And on the second day I was accosted by a drunk. I had to come up to Foula, a small island west of Britain's most northerly Shetland Isles to escape the feeling of violence. I've spent the summer here writing this book.

But crime in Britain is undoubtedly the product of a society that emphasises wealth, whilst practically denying a few million of the population the chance to get any. Some rather stupid people say they could get work if they wanted it, earn “an honest day's pay”, but in the real world some need a “dishonest day's pay” and even those who take a job in an attempt to stay on the straight and narrow must accept an honest day's underpay. I once saw an immigrant in London who had literally been driven mad by form-filling and waiting, in his attempts to get state benefit.

The police presence in the USSR was not very intimidating. I had two brushes with the law. The first one happened when I stepped off a curb in Leningrad before the traffic police said I could. A whistle pulled me up. Then, whilst waiting at Irkutsk airport, I foolishly snapped a few interesting-looking citizens on the air field for this book I was marched off to the airport security office in the Intourist lounge where my film was ceremonially ruined. Not that it made a lot of difference in the end, as the airport X-ray machines ruined my films anyway (which is why there aren't many from my travels in this book!)

Neither experience was too frightening—unlike my brushes with the delightful British police, who on one occasion kicked me for looking cheeky and on another insisted

on marching me to a football match when I arrived at Nottingham station. Not because I actually wanted to go but because I was wearing blue—the colour of the visiting team. No amount of argument could let me out, but I did collect another kick.

No doubt a few bad apples that spoil an otherwise happy bunch. My experiences have certainly not made me anti-police; they have a tough job and I don't envy them. But those are my experiences.

Crime is a product of each society, and each society must deal with it as best it can. In the USSR that means prison for the captain of a pleasure cruiser that collided with another in the Black Sea, due to negligence of the crew; the same attitude was shown by the crew of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* under guidance of their management, who appear monthly worried about bad publicity for the company, not the two hundred or so dead people. I doubt they'll go to prison either.

But let's meet our interviewees. They are my friends John Whiting, a Legal Executive from Nottingham, currently specialising in repossessing houses from people who can't afford to pay for them; and a prosecuting lawyer, Edward Bogatirev, from Sochi. Sochi City Council's consulting lawyer, Tamara Kachanovskaja, also answered a few of my questions.

I asked first: "What are the major crimes in our countries?"

*Edward:*

"In the Soviet Union probably the major problem is theft and corruption within factories and enterprises. Smuggling and bribery are also common. Thirdly, juvenile crime seems to be increasing. Violent crime such as murder is not a major problem. It is mostly manslaughter and accidental death when it occurs."

*John:*

"The major crimes in the UK are theft and obtaining money by deception. Violent crime such as assault and grievous bodily harm would also figure prominently."

"...Is crime on the increase or decrease within each country?"

*Edward:*

"It is very difficult to say, though I do not think there has been much change. There are no statistics in the

press to show such increases or decreases, which is unfortunate. There is now a campaign in the press to make these figures available. It would be very interesting and useful for people involved in the legal process to know. The process of openness is on the way and we are making efforts to speed it up in legal bodies for the public good."

*John:*

"Crime is increasing generally; there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, statistics are increasing as more crimes are being reported, previously the proportion of crimes reported compared to the number committed was less.

"Secondly, police methods have changed. Formerly 'the Bobby on the beat', as we called him, or community policeman, became acquainted with people in a particular area and was aware of which individuals were likely to cause trouble, and could check on them if any occurred. When police were taken out of the community, and in some instances became a law in themselves, public confidence decreased and crime increased.

"Thirdly, people are more mobile with cars and other vehicles. They move from area to area committing crimes whilst police are limited to country regions. Unless the crime is major—such as murder or rape—police forces do not often pool their information and a crime pattern is not established.

"Fourthly, the punishment of imprisonment isn't a strong enough deterrent any more. Are our prisons too soft? I bet ten years hard labour Soviet style would deter young men from beating up defenceless old ladies."

"...How is crime prevented?"

*Edward:*

"My job includes preventive crime education of the local population. The militia are part and parcel of these activities, helping to take care of all these things. They seek to prevent crime by working out the people who are potential criminals. I don't mean actual people usually, but more the type of people who are in a position to break the law.

"Glasnost has made some improvement already for us as the number of acts regarded as crimes are on the decrease. For example, it is now legal to earn extra money out of work hours. Before, this was illegal and caused many problems."

*John:*

"We have the 'Neighbourhood watch' scheme in which people are encouraged to keep an eye on each other's properties and look out for trouble. It's a good idea, but rather ineffective as only the wealthy areas bother to participate; the poorer ones don't have such schemes.

"Those who are actually convicted of crimes are often given another chance if it is a first, or even a second, offence; they have a suspended prison sentence."

"...When a crime is committed, is there a fixed sentence, and do you think the sentencing is effective?"

*Edward:*

"We have fixed terms, but these vary according to the severity of the crime. For example, rape. If a man rapes a woman the punishment is three to seven years. If it is group rape the punishment is five to ten years. Child rape ranges from ten to fifteen years, though there is also the death penalty if the crime is especially bad. The time can be spent partially in prison and partially in a labour camp, but more often than not the whole sentence would be in a labour camp."

I asked Edward, out of interest, if there was the category of crime "rape within marriage" which has been publicised as a crime in Britain through rape victims and women's pressure groups. He said, "In theory this is possible, but in my 40 years experience I have never come across such a case. In general terms rape seems to be decreasing in the USSR."

"The renewal of legal law should improve our position in various ways. A number of acts now regarded as crimes will be abolished—such as minor delinquency. The judicial process will be simplified with smaller violations dealt with separately. On the other hand major crime needs more complex and comprehensive legal processes and higher courts."

*John:*

"We have maximum penalties for most crimes but sentencing in many tends to be lenient. I feel strongly that punishment rarely fits the crime and that methods should be changed. Young offenders should not be placed in detention centres because this just acts as a 'school' where they can compare notes for future crimes. Prisoners should be kept in solitary confinement for all offences for the

first quarter of their sentence, then allowed to rehabilitate for the next quarter, and then be considered for parole if their behaviour is good. Second offenders should not be given the chance of parole. Solitary confinement may sound strong, but a lot of current problems stem from the fact that a lot of criminals have friends in prison. Those committing violent crimes should be subject to hard labour."

"...Does either country have the death penalty and if not, should they have it?"

*Edward:*

"Yes, we have the death penalty for murder and other serious crime. It is possible to be sentenced to death for large scale bribery, even."

*John:*

"It is a major debate here, increasingly so, but personally I do not feel the death penalty should be reintroduced. A life sentence should mean life. Those convicted of multiple murders or murder of policemen should have life imprisonment in solitary confinement. Rapists and child molesters should have 15 years to life."

"...Is there a judge/jury system in the USSR?"

*Tamara:*

"No. We have several levels of judiciary. The main one is the 'people's court' in which there is a judge and two people's representatives who make the judgement and decide punishment according to evidence put forward by prosecuting and defending lawyers. Higher legal bodies have a panel of judges and no peoples representatives. The highest court is the Supreme Soviet."

"...How much does legal assistance cost a client?"

*Tamara:*

"We have a scale. For an act of hooliganism, for example, the accused pays 25 roubles before the proceedings begin. It is a one-off total payment."

*John:*

"It varies greatly. If someone pleads guilty, and has a low income entitling them to government support in paying the lawyer 'Legal Aid', as it is called, they would probably pay around £50 to £200. Similarly, if a client pleads not guilty, but still gets legal aid, they'd probably pay £150 or more."

"...How much does a lawyer earn?"

*Tamara:*

"There is no average pay. A solicitor is quite highly paid. A consulting lawyer at a factory or somewhere might average 150 roubles per month." (approx. £2,000 per annum)

*John:*

"Wages for a qualified lawyer start around £15,000 per annum, but these can rise during service and are higher for those working in London."

"...Does anyone have any opinion about how the legal bodies work in each other's countries?"

*John:*

"I know little about the legal system in the USSR, but I'd rather have a jury than judges—mainly because in Britain all the judges went to private schools, then universities for the wealthy, Oxford or Cambridge, and are vastly removed from the reality of life. Juries allow for the changing morality within society."

*Edward:*

"I recently visited London and attended lectures on the British legal system, including one by Lord Carrington. I travelled very recently and, as a lawyer, I doubt everything, so I have not fully assessed my long-term opinions yet. I can tell you that I was impressed by the lawyers I met, impressed by their friendly, generous, open natures. Besides this I fell in love with England. Despite the difference in our social systems I think English lawyers are similar to our own."

## TALKING TO THE WORKERS

*"Socialist society benefits when all it's members work with total dedication to multiply the public wealth. And it benefits the capitalist when there are unemployed workers on the labour market, in this case he can always lay down his own terms of pay and working conditions."*

*USSR. 100 Questions and Answers, 1986*

Now half a century and more after socialism's coming of age, the different status of the Eastern bloc countries, ruled by their workers, and many of the industrialised Western countries, is extremely interesting to compare. Certain basic facts lead to huge differences in life styles in East and West.

*Example one.* In the USSR everyone is guaranteed a job, there is a shortage of labour in many areas. However because everyone has a job there is no incentive to work hard or well, except the concept promoted in wall murals of working together to help forward the state. That concept is real but for many Soviets it is obviously so far detached from their lives—an idea that has been with them since birth, but doesn't seem to make much difference to how they actually live, that they just don't bother. So the consequence is that people are very rude in shops, that there's no efficiency, that there are queues and shortages. If an individual or a company fails to perform, it goes under and people are out of work. With huge numbers of unemployed people can't afford to lose their jobs, so they usually work hard and are polite and helpful to



customers. Yet the system only works efficiently in the West because the people are scared of losing their jobs. Is that right? It certainly works more efficiently.

*Example Two.* In the USSR most people are happy with their wages. They are not happy with what they can buy. In the West people aren't happy with their wages, but there are plenty of things they wish they could buy. Because the state controls all the money and owns all the buildings, rent is nominal, so is income tax and phone and power bills. They cannot, however, make people produce better goods more efficiently because they cannot sack them or cut their wages. In the West people can be underpaid and exploited by businesses, backed by the government because they are scared of losing their work and losing money. It is also true that in the Soviet Union materialism is not so important or as highly prized in the West. But Soviets work longer hours and are many years behind in terms of modern appliances that make household work easier.

So the question is an ideological one. It is also a question of upbringing. According to the wealthy the "class structure" has been eradicated, and this is their excuse for eradicating the unions. It is not wholly true that the class structure no longer exists, though it has certainly broken down and those with jobs in the West, of whatever sort (except for government created jobs which exploit the worker in terms of sub-poverty level pay) are usually quite well-off. Jobs traditionally termed "working class" are now often paid as highly as jobs termed "middle class". But even the unemployed in the West would be unlikely to want to move to the socialist system according to the Soviet interpretation, just as Soviet citizens are more than happy with their more genuine equality (despite the endless attempts by both sides to claim that in fact both would like to switch to the other—an amusing prospect if it could be achieved simultaneously). Seriously speaking such an experiment would do the world the most good since the invention of "the wheel".

It is also true, however, that by maintaining huge numbers of unemployed people who live below the "poverty line", the ruling classes are still able to maintain their power. Consequentially other forms of exploitation are still rife. For example in a factory employing 20 women and

ten men, the women may still only be paid two thirds of the salary of men and they cannot campaign for equal pay because they will be fired. Though there is legislation to protect them it is not yet good enough to really protect them.

In the USSR such exploitation could not happen. But in the USSR the underpaid woman, when getting home, would be more likely to have to do all the housework than in the West, and do that house work with only about a quarter of the electric appliances used in Europe and North America. It is "the roundabouts and the swings."

In the USSR, to combat the problem of "no competition" which additionally leads to wide spread corruption and the black market, Mr. Gorbachev's regime is introducing more workers co-operatives and more direct benefits for those who do well. It is called "competitive socialism". I visited an excellent Cantonese restaurant in the Far East of the USSR which was by far the best restaurant visited, and the friendliness of staff was a part of it. They did not have to be subservient, it was just nice not to feel that you were causing them great irritation by purchasing a meal from them. In Britain Mrs. Thatcher is making her policies of private ownership of previously public industries such as oil, telephones, gas and so on by selling shares in them to all. It is called "popular capitalism".

Though both sides are keen to deny that they are compromising and that the two systems are moving closer together it is clear that both would benefit from an increased exchange of ideas. Gorbachev has the intelligence to see this, the West remains much too idealistic (and stupid) to admit it, besides Western rulers do not represent their entire populations, they are each happily putting into practice policies which do benefit their own section of the community.

During my travels I met a number of workers. One of the points that interested me the most was that people employed as milkers, builders, pig feeders and so on seemed to be paid double the wages of teachers, doctors, lawyers and so on. The theory apparently being that the latter are much more enjoyable jobs, so why should they get paid more too?!

Due to space limitations I can only reproduce the highlights of three of the Soviet interviews and one with a

union representative from my home town of Long Eaton in Derbyshire.

The first workers I met were from the hundred year old Electrocila factory in Leningrad whose main output since the revolution has been turbines for generators, right up to the million plus kilowatt generators used in nuclear power stations, including Chernobyl. The factory contributes to research into nuclear synthesis, the theoretically safer form of nuclear energy currently being internationally researched. But they also manufacture consumer goods for the population, generators for atomic ice breakers and so on. It is in fact a huge factory spread over three sites employing over 20,000 workers, exporting to more than 80 countries.

The staff are provided with holiday rest homes, pioneer camps for the children, cultural centres, their own 800 bed hospital, a disease prevention centre, social centre, nursery and so on. The factory has it's own high school and college.

The secretary of the Communist Party at the factory, Alexander Egorov, claimed that it's biggest problems were labour shortages, discipline problems and a failure by suppliers to deliver required equipment.

"Our problems have been with efficiency and labour. We used to have an outflow of workers of about 9 per cent, but this is down to  $6\frac{1}{2}$  per cent so things are improving. We are introducing mechanisation, robotisation, more effective, highly productive machinery. So though we have a labour shortage, we will be able to produce more.

"Since the laws on laziness and drunkenness have been tightened up things have improved too. Now every worker is a member of and responsible to a contract team. If he is drunk and loses a days' work then the team lose their bonus and he must face up to them.

"It is a problem that we must accept any worker who is sent to us, including drunkards. We try to re-educate them, but it is difficult and often nothing can be done. Some improve but most do not."

The point about automation particularly interested me. I noticed in the book shops wherever I went there were large sections filled with volumes on industrial robots and so on. My experience of the USSR was of chronic inefficiency, abacus still being used in the shops, computers few and far between. But in the UK, new technology is

one of the reasons given for the huge numbers of unemployed people, machines do the jobs that men did. Was this not a danger in the USSR?

"No, it is not the technology that puts people out of work, it is the system, there is no problem with that here. Our problem is we don't have enough people to fill the jobs."

"What do people get paid to work here?"

"There is an average of 211 roubles per month, but then there are bonuses, in the last month of each year we get the '13th month' bonus. But we should stress that there is a flat rent of 25 roubles a month including power and phone and we have only 7 per cent income tax in exchange for which we get holiday vouchers. There's also a 1 per cent contribution to the union. Travel pass is six roubles a month. So all we can really buy with our money is consumer goods and there is a shortage of these. I think most people are basically happy with their wages."

"And how many hours a week do you work for these?"

"We have a 41-hour week. We used to work the last Saturday in every month, these were called 'black Saturdays'. They used to say Leningrad had 'black Saturdays and white nights'. The 'white nights' are the week or two when the sun does not set in the summer. Anyway, now we work an extra 12 minutes a day instead of on the Saturday."

By now Alexander Egorov had been joined by Alexey Prelov, a turner and union official, and by a young worker, Viacheslav Serebrianikov. So I asked them how they spent their spare time.

*Alexey:*

"Well I enjoy gardening and collecting wild mushrooms at my dacha, I go out there most weekends. The factory is given an area in the countryside, by a river where workers can build wooden country houses and grow vegetables or whatever. My wife, however, is mad on television so it's difficult to get her out of the house."

"We like cinemas, theatres, concerts and order tickets through the factory. We also like to travel around the country, special advertising has been promoting such trips recently. Last month we went to Tbilisi in Georgia."

*Viacheslav:*

"I have a small child who stays with my wife's mother whilst I and my wife work here. So most weekends we go to visit our son in the country. Otherwise it's concerts or

the cinema, sports, I like football. I used to do weight-lifting but have given it up. I'm a member of a 'Sputnik' group, which is the organisation of young people. They send about 200 people abroad each year, all over the place."

*Alexey:*

"Yes, I went to Spain on a cruise, I liked it very much. The people were very friendly, we were there at Christmas time. There were lots of things in the shops, but also there were a lot of poor people which was sad."

Changing the flow of the conversation, I asked about the factory's output. How had the factory's production of nuclear generators changed since Chernobyl?

*Alexander:*

"Well the requirement has stopped altogether because of a decision to move nuclear projects away from central areas and in to areas of very low or zero population. Formerly building was in the Ukraine, the new plan is to build them in the northern areas of the USSR. It was not the generator but the safety system that failed in Chernobyl, we didn't manufacture that."

"I think many lessons were learnt from the disaster there, we have a proverb that we 'study to honour our mistakes', to succeed, we must minimise the chances of accidents."

"So do you think nuclear power is the future for the USSR, or is there an alternative?"

*Alexander:*

"We are working on nuclear synthesis. This is a generator with a water cooling system instead of hydrogen cooled. This will be safer."

"Doesn't the decision to move nuclear power plant construction away from centres of civilisation show that people are not convinced that nuclear power is safe?"

*Alexander:*

"Security is given priority, the Chernobyl situation aggravated the situation with the power supply, we must have nuclear power to progress."

"Changing the subject back, is there anything you'd like to see in the Soviet Union from the West?"

*Alexey:*

"Good shoes! There is a dislike for shoes manufactured here, no one wants them, everyone prefers foreign shoes, they are a pleasure and a joy to wear. We hope the

process of restructuring will improve the output of 'Skorohod'—the state shoe factory.

"Then there's more modern radios, tapes, TV. Ours are not good and there are not enough. Everybody likes the modern styles, not just the young. The problem has been the planning scheme for factories which must increase the quantity of output, rather than it's quality. Now they have introduced state quality control which I hope will improve things."

"And now, here's your chance to pass on a message to Western readers, what will it be?"

*Viacheslav:*

"Young people in the West should take a greater part in working for peace, I have the impression that they do not do enough. We should expand communication and contracts on both sides as well as increasing tourism and all links."

*Alexey:*

"Working people can be sure of the future here. I know that I will have a good job and that tomorrow I will still have a good job. I wish that people in the West were not living in fear of losing their jobs. I wish them well."

"We fought together against fascism in the last war, we had a common language then and we should now. We should combine efforts to fight harder for the peace. I feel angry that the British Prime Minister said we need nuclear weapons to keep the peace."

The next worker I met was sixty-year-old Ludmila Moiseeva at a large dairy farm near Irkutsk. The farm was only a part of a larger collective farm. Across the Soviet Union these huge farms, often towns in themselves, produce much of the countries meat, vegetables, tea and dairy products. Their output is supplemented by millions of home-growers at their country dachas. We did not talk for long but she seemed a happy lady with her cows, and made a few answers I think worth reproducing. First of all I asked her how long she'd been on the collective farm.

"In 1939 I moved here with my family from the Ukraine. We lived here in the Eloka village and then when I married we moved to Pivovarikha village. I've worked on this farm since ... (thinks hard) 1955."

"What's changed in that time?"

"Well, of course there have been substantial changes.

After the Great Patriotic war it was hard to support the farm, the lands were not cultivated and the cattle were thin due to lack of forrage. Obviously working and living conditions have improved over the thirty years. When I started all the work was manual, now 95 per cent of it is mechanised. Soon they plan to make it 100 per cent mechanised but I think that will be a bad thing. Only a cow hand knows how much food each cow needs on a particular day, the machines to feed them automatically will not know."

"Are pay and conditions the same for men and women?"

"Yes, of course. Women often earn more than men as we are harder workers. I earn more. We work six, seven-hour-shifts a week, and my average wage is almost 500 roubles a month, two and a half times the national average. This is because our farm is one of the most successful in Siberia, production is high level and high quality."

"How do you spend all your wages?"

"Why, as I like!"

"And what do you do when you're not working?"

"Well, I have two grandsons and one granddaughter whom I like to spend time with, we go to the forest together. I have a piece of land I like to work on, I have a flower garden. And besides I like TV."

Ludmila was quite happy with what she had, and preferred not to comment on life in the West as she had never been there and did not feel her views could be accurate enough as a result of this. So we moved on. To another collective farm, this time a newer pig farm in the Far East.

Employing more than a thousand people and producing 14,000 tonnes of pork a year the factory was founded in 1975, it's employees working a five-day week, eight hours a day. It operates a more or less automated system of pork production, with employees responsible for between 60 and 4,000 pigs each. The factories production ideas came from Italy. All the employees live in the nearby especially created village of Nekrasovka which has its own schools, domestic services, essential power and water services as well as shops and markets. The factory boasted virtually zero outflow of workers and a profit of 8 million roubles in the past year.

I talked to union chief Raisa Tyagunova and top operator (she has won prizes) Stalina Latisheva.

"Could they tell me if employees were locals?"

"No. Most people have come from the Ukraine, Western Russia, the southern republics. They have moved here specially to work on the farm, which has been promoted on TV and radio there. The incentives were a grant for free movement, many came from villages to a higher standard of housing. There was a pay bonus of 30 per cent above the average. Some moved with their whole families, others have moved alone and are waiting for their families to join them. Now there is a waiting list of people wanting to come here."

I asked Stalina exactly what her work involved?

"I take care of the pigs, animal husbandry, handling that sort of thing. Pig food is controlled automatically, I take care that growth is real, I look after 1,800 pigs. A pig is raised for the period of 222 days before slaughter, but I take care of them for the 116 days."

"Do women get the same pay and conditions as men?"

"Yes, it is the same, it just depends who works harder. I am a deputy to the Council of Deputies in local government and I've won awards for production. I've just had a free holiday in Japan as one prize."

"So would you like to see a female version of Mr. Gorbachev in power in the USSR?"

"No, I don't think so. I believe a man is more far-sighted than women. A woman should take care of the family and children, the state of the nation is too heavy a burden to hold on the shoulders of a woman."

"So how do you feel about Mrs. Thatcher?"

"It is a load too heavy for a woman. This is why she makes mistakes! I can only hope she will do her utmost to maintain peace and we would praise her if she took away unemployment. This is my personal opinion."

"What do you enjoy the most about your job?"

"I like animals, domestic animals. I feel pity for the pigs, as for any creature that is to be slaughtered, but we know what they are raised for."

"Would you prefer to see other farming methods rather than the automated ones?"

"I see your point. We have herd farms, all animals have the opportunity to graze freely and are happy. This farm has to produce more meat, more quickly on a smaller piece of land. This farm is more efficient and more practical."



"What did you like about Japan, and did you bring anything back with you?"

"I was very impressed by the fact that it was such a clean country, even though it is so small. People were very punctual and I have the impression that people are very peace-loving there after the Hiroshima experience, ordinary people I mean. They were very polite and generous, they accepted us with open hearts. I brought back a piece of carpet, I like the bright colours."

"Is there anything you'd like to see introduced from Japan, or anywhere in the West?"

"No, I don't think so, we don't need all the hi-tec stuff. I am happy here, I have everything I need. I don't face any problems, I have my family, my house, my job, enough money, I am praised for my work."

"What are your impressions of other Western countries?"

"I feel that people are not happy, I cannot believe they can be when so many of their countrymen are unemployed and even hungry. I think there should be equal rights to schooling, food, medical treatment, everything."

"Do you think that Soviet-style socialism would work in Britain and that the majority would support it?"

"I think it would work and that the common people would support it. They are the majority."

"Where do you get this impression from?"

"I read papers, books, watch TV. I see how people are fighting against unemployment, missiles."

"So why do you think the Communist Party has such a tiny minority in the British elections and why do they have a different approach to socialism and communism than the Soviet Union?"

"I think that people are born and grow up in your country and are only used to that system. They do not have a chance to see ours, except for the bad things."

I asked Stalina if she had questions for me at that point, and apart from the usual ones about my impressions of Mrs. Thatcher, she asked why our system of information was different to the USSR's. I could only think to answer that in the Soviet Union people are not allowed to know everything, at least in the past. In the West we are allowed to know everything, but those with the power to tell us, choose not to.

Back in Britain I got some comments on the circumstances of our workers from Irene Hewitt, a union representative at a restaurant in Long Eaton, my home town, which made the headlines a few years ago when the union there clashed with the restaurant owners. The owners wanted to enforce a rule that waitresses had to fit in to a small size dress, if they didn't they were fired. This idea obviously amused many national papers and the women's campaign received the publicity that many didn't, basically it was sexual discrimination—the restaurant owners simply wanted small, preferably pretty girls to serve food, their experience and ability was not going to be as important as what they looked like. Irene's union fought and won. But the catering trade is not a wonderful place to work anyway, as I found out. "What was the pay range," I asked.

"It's very low, from £1.70 to £2.25 an hour, there is a great deal of staff movement from one job to the next. The major problem is with unions, if the workers got together and supported each other then we could improve things, but many are afraid of losing their jobs or prospects if they join the union and so the union is not as strong as it could be, and should be."

"When we talk about 'workers' these days, who do we mean?"

"Everyone who goes to work for somebody. This is Labour Party policy. Some people think that those who work in offices or whatever and don't get their hands dirty are no longer workers, but they are."

"Is there a maximum length for the working week?"

"It's supposedly 39½ hours, but it can go up to 50 or so, depending on what has to be done."

"What do you like about the job?"

"I meet people from all walks of life which makes the job very interesting."

"Anything you'd rather be doing (workwise!)"

"I was trained to be a window dresser when I was younger and I'd prefer to do that. Time has passed though and like most people of my age group, these jobs need more qualifications than they did twenty years ago."

"What are your impressions of the USSR?"

"I'm very interested in the country, I've seen holidays

photos and films from friends that have been there. I am very impressed by many aspects of the place and hope to visit myself within the next few years. I don't know what the people there think of us, but I understand they make you very welcome when you visit their country.

"My impression is that there's an awful lot of culture there and that sometimes I think it might be better for less culture and more pure relaxation time. I don't know too much about the unions there so can't really comment. If, as I believe, there is no unemployment in the USSR we must try to learn from that. They create real work and improve the country for all by doing so."

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And so back to Siberia for a meeting with Vladimir Muravyev, the head of a contract team building a new theatre of musical comedy in Irkutsk. I met him on a delightful June afternoon and asked him what he enjoyed about his work?

"Well I build a variety of buildings. I hate sitting in one place doing a dull job, so I like to work outdoors. The other thing is that I enjoy contributing to a piece of work, something that you can see. My ambition was always to be a geologist, my father is head of a geological team. Then when I grew up I changed my mind."

"What are the union facilities like for someone who works on a temporary site?"

"Well, it is a bit more difficult than a factory. Our union's Administration is seeking to provide us with holidays in the summer. Basically we have the same benefits as other unions, hospitals, health centres. On the other hand, conditions in factories are more harmful, we work in the open air.

"The union provides us with houses, we would like more, it is natural, we are only human! We feel we should be given more because we're builders, doing important work in constructing the state."

"Is there a standard wage?"

"The average is between 250 and 300 roubles per month."

"Is there enough building labour?"

"I can't say for the whole country but we have a shortage of labour. We need to work harder in the summer

season so that we can make up for time loss in the winter season. When the temperature drops below  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  we cannot work, though we are still paid. Up to that point we warm up the engines and keep them running."

"What are your hobbies?"

"I love nature, to go to the country. I have a car and I enjoy driving out into the countryside. I have a dacha there and I work on the garden, I'm growing a few trees too."

"Anything you'd like to see from the West?"

"A more developed international tourist industry, I think. I'd like to see more international travel.

"However I would like to clear up a misconception I believe exists in the West that we cannot move where we like. We can travel wherever we like in the country. We can sign agreements to swap houses with people wanting to move to this area from an area we want to move to."

"Anything from the Soviet Union you think we could do with?"

"Yes, our 'open Russian soul' should be introduced in other nations. We accept people for what they are, openly, honestly. We do not attack people just because we do not agree with them.

"I would like to say that I hope you write the truth and that you and your countrymen will visit us more frequently. We would be happy to see you."

One of the major issues of contention between the USSR and other countries is the role of the Church. No one can deny that in the past the Church has been suppressed by the Soviet authorities. But the present situation is difficult to ascertain.

In Moscow I talked to Hieromonk Irinarkh Gresin at the Danilov Monastery,\* which was handed back to the church in 1983 and has been in the process of renovation since. It is to become the official residence of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988, when the church will have entered its second millenium.

Before talking to the Hieromonk, I visited one of the churches in the monastery, where a service was underway. The scene was amazing, a sort of cross between a pop concert and pensions day at the post office, as little old ladies dressed in black (*baboushki*) fought to get nearer the stage, on which heavily bearded priests in black robes conducted the service. There were no seats and no music. Candles blazed away as in a Roman Catholic Church, with frequent frantic crossings of oneself. The feeling of dedication and belief was very strong.

The scene was very different from my own parish church in Sawley, Derbyshire where, if one arrives late, stumbling with the huge wooden door, everyone turns to look at you; you tiptoe to a rear pew, then CLANK! the door bangs shut behind you. "Whoops, sorry!"

My parish priest, Rural Dean John Warman of the Church of England, provided answers for my questions from this side of the Baltic.

It is unfortunate that this section is only able to deal

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\* Now it is the official residence of the Patriarch.—Ed.

with two of the many versions of Christian belief, not to mention all the other religions. Obviously there is a large book to be written on this subject alone.

In the USSR faiths co-exist in addition to the Russian Orthodox Church. There are about a million Evangelical Christian-Baptists in more than 5,000 communities. Roman Catholics have over 1,100 churches, mostly in Lithuania, and some members in Latvia, the Western Ukraine and Byelorussia. Muslims live mainly in the Central Asian Republic; most of them are Sunnites, but with some Shiites in the Caucasus and some Ismailites in the Pamirs. Judaists have 92 synagogues, many jews living in Moscow, Bukhara, Georgia and other regions. Buddhism is practised in many Far Eastern regions and in the Chita and Irkutsk areas of the Russian Federation.

There is not much comment made with even an attempt at impartiality on the Church in the USSR, so there follows the interviews with the priests.

"Do you think the ideals of Christianity come closer to the political ideals of capitalism or communism?"

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"There are two aspects of Christianity. Firstly there is the doctrine, which is only applicable to believers. Second, the moral dimension represents general human values. These are reflected in history. Such morals do not always bind believers under any political system.

"A political system, ideally, should be structured to promote general moral values; a major issue is the moral influence of a country or system throughout the world. For believers under any system, the first function is moral: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect'."

*John Warman:*

"Christian belief and politics are inextricably linked. Everyone I am involved with is my brother or sister, and how we organise our society is an expression of our beliefs. Whether the Church should hold political power as a distinct entity, as it still does to some extent even today, and did far more in the past, is more questionable. I do not believe it should be linked directly with politics or a political party. Christians disagree on the best way of arranging society for its members. This applies to war, nuclear or not. Some people see nuclear weapons as totally different from non-nuclear, others do not.

"In terms of the relationship with communism or capitalism people say, 'It isn't that Christianity has tried and failed, just that it has never been properly tried.' In fact any system can only be tried by humans. Varied, inconsistent, fallible humans. On the surface socialism and capitalism both accept that human beings are selfish and greedy. Socialism attempts to control this for the good of it. Capitalism argues to let everyone get on with it and it'll turn out OK in the end. Of course it doesn't work like this.

"Christianity accepts human failings, in Christians and non-believers alike. There are different versions of socialism—look at China. Note also that 'communist' and 'Marxist' are used as insults to undermine another point of view without attempting to understand it or argue against it—like 'capitalist' for that matter.

"In Britain many Conservatives would take a more superficially socialist view than the present government on issues like unemployment or nuclear weapons. But then some socialists are guilty of their own greed and selfishness. When this is mixed with mismanagement the results from good intentions can be very bad."

"We are told of suppression and persecution of the Church in the USSR. What is your comment on this?"

*John Warman:*

"My knowledge of this is second-hand and limited, but it appears there are two groupings. First, the Russian Orthodox Church is very deeply rooted in tradition, and is tolerated by the state with many restrictions. Second, the Protestant Church, mainly Baptist, operates underground and is actively persecuted by the state. The persistence of the Russian Orthodox Church shows that even the Soviet system cannot destroy a 1000-year tradition in 70 years. The survival and growth of the Baptists and other Protestant Churches show that persecution doesn't usually win, it merely generates an even stronger force in what is persecuted. Jesus accepted people as they were, respected them, loved them, and called them to follow him. But he was merciless in asking questions that revealed people's true selves and cut through any hypocrisy. This was one reason why the poor and desperate, with nothing to hide, found hope in Jesus, while those with religious or political power and respectability to uphold, felt threatened by him."

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"Obviously things have been very hard for us. The 1927 decree on loyal attitudes to the Soviet Government was bad news. In 1975 the laws on religion were changed for the better. The Church is playing an increasing role in society once more, and the process of restructuring is the same for us. Attitudes are changing in society however, and a new law is being prepared that will improve the situation further. No one would say now that the Church and Soviet Union have no future. The Soviet future is not atheist. Christians all work together. There is a process of democratisation in religion as well.

"The first duty of believers is to fulfil their belief, but they are members of the state, and these two roles can and must co-exist."

"...How do you become a priest?"

*John Warman:*

"In the Church of England each diocese has a representative and a panel that sees those candidates for ordination. A selected candidate then goes for three years to a theological college, before being ordained deacon in the parish to which he is going as curate (assistant priest). A year later he may be ordained priest. Women may be ordained deacons, but not priests.

"The next major step up is to Diocesan Bishop, of which there are 43 in the Church of England. However there are many different roles—you could be on the staff of a cathedral, or a canon, or a dean. I am a Rural Dean and have responsibility over a group of nineteen parishes. Priests may also work as chaplains to the armed forces, prisons, hospitals, universities, industry and so on."

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"In my childhood I dreamt of becoming one of the clergy; my spiritual fathers were monks and monastic life was not a mystery or unexpected to me. To join the clergy it is, of course, necessary to be a believer and attend church, then seek recommendation by a parish priest. Then you must qualify for the seminary, which is harder all the time with an increasing number of candidates. As a Priest-Monk I am able to celebrate divine Sundays. I have a special duty in a section of the church that deals with peace making, and am working for a conference of world peace making."



"...What about the wealth of the Church? Many non-believers, and believers, are appalled in some of the poorer countries where the people live in poverty whilst the church is filled with riches and rotting food 'given to God'. Similarly there is apparent huge wealth in the Vatican whilst peasants starve in other parts of the world?"

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"There is no contribution on the part of the state to the church, all funding is internal, largely from donations. When there is major church expenditure it must be approved by the head of a department and then applications go to the patriarch. There are certain conditions, but after ten years at the academy, when one becomes a learned monk, things are easier. People have to live as novices for six years if they come from the outside world, to see if they really do believe. So people do not join the church for wealth.

"The gold in our churches is painted, a witness to the historical richness of the church and an expression of the outer value of religion. On the other hand, we realise there is poverty in the world; certainly we could not justify building magnificent palaces. As Jesus said, 'If you do not feed the hungry, I do not know you.' There is a saying that the early Christians had wooden cups but golden hearts.

"We try to contribute to famine appeals but this is difficult because of the currency exchange problem. We sent a plane load of food and medical equipment to Ethiopia during the famine. We indirectly participate in the Soviet Peace Fund by making regular contributions to it.

"The magnificence of the church is a reflection of spiritual wealth and helps people to increase their understanding of morality."

*John Warman:*

"The Vatican is wealthy and there is much room for corruption. On the other hand the Roman Catholic Church is a huge international organisation. I'd say perpetual questioning and sensitive reform are required to use resources properly. The same applies to the Church of England. The Church Commissioners control enormous investments, but there are 15,000 parish churches, 12,000 clergy and 44 cathedrals.

"As to the decoration of churches, I think Jesus saw

wealth as a barrier or hindrance. It is so easy to concentrate on wealth to the exclusion of caring for other people, to trust in wealth rather than God. The other side of the picture is reflected in Jesus's Jewish background—that we use resources that we have properly. In the Communion service, (quoting a Jewish prayer) we say to God, 'all things come from you, and of your own do we give you'. We should not be afraid of using our gifts, material and human.

"Richly decorated churches could be either a sign of earthly power and riches or a symbol of giving to God the best that we can. The motive is vital, though the way it is expressed may vary widely."

"...The ordination of women is a major issue in Britain at present. What is your feeling on this?"

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"There are no women clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church and I hope there never will be. If tradition allowed it, I would respect it. Women have many opportunities to express themselves in other ways, such as nunneries.

"Mary, the mother of God, was more powerful than any other human being, and had no wish to be ordained. Anglicans and Protestants are not included under this rule as they do not have apostolic succession.

"Another, practical reason, is that there are enough men already, so there is no need to break this order in our church. The Orthodox tradition has kept closer to the original values of the church than other forms."

*John Warman:*

"There are two basic things involved in this issue. First, tradition, religious and other forms. Second, our view of women in our society, family and Church.

"The trend in Western society is to place women on a par with male human beings (there is a problem with 'man' as this means both male human beings and all human beings). Tradition, however, has powerful emotional and psychological factors behind it.

"The Orthodox Church lays great stress on 'Mary, the mother of God'—a phrase which Protestants would use sparingly.

"Arguing from the New Testament is tricky. The apostles were all male, but Jesus went out of his way to welcome women, respecting them. Most Christians feel the general

movement of Jesus's teaching is towards accepting people equally, as does Saint Paul's whatever his respect for his Jewish upbringing may have told him."

"...What about the divisions in the church? This again seems to be a major issue, detrimental to religion as a whole."

*John Warman:*

"There are several kinds of division. There are those caused by past power struggles amongst leaders—still difficult to heal. Second, there are differences in belief. Third, there are differences in the style of worship and temperament. Fourth, is the difference of place or language which give a local or national identity.

"All these divisions are to do with being human, with which Jesus identified himself. However, such divisions can, of course, lead to the breakdown of fellowship between Christians. During this century progress has been made by Christians towards accepting each other despite or because of differences (we learn from each other and respect each other).

"In Northern Ireland there are links with race, which is linked to oppression, and fuels the fire of racial hatred. Whatever the historic reasons no one can now say if it's the Protestants oppressing the Catholics or the Catholics (the IRA and Republic) threatening the Protestants."

"...What about the support for the Church? Is it declining?"

*John Warman:*

"In some parts of Britain this is true. In others, numbers are increasing, especially in the more prosperous suburbs. ('Is this good or bad?' I ask myself. 'Do people with reasonable affluence feel a spiritual lack, or is it a social matter?')

"There is a strong feeling that most people do understand a spiritual dimension to life, though they may not wish to explore it. Churches will take very different ways in different societies. In Africa and Latin America the number going to church are expanding rapidly."

*Irinarkh Gresin:*

"In the scriptures Jesus says, 'When I come for the second time, will I find any religion here?' There are many more young people these days, fewer of the older generations. The new believers are more intelligent, less superstitious. Today is a feast day, but still a working day,

which is why the church is largely filled with older women.

"When I entered the seminary in 1975 there were 300 students, now there are 600, and three or four candidates for each place. It is not the church of the young, but there are many young people, women especially. Women are more sensitive and can feel more delicately."

PART THREE.

**INTERVIEWS**

So far I have related conversations with people whose careers could be compared in some way to their fellows in other countries. In addition, I was fortunate enough to meet a few characters who are pretty well incomparable.

The first of these is Boris Piotrovsky, director of Leningrad's Hermitage Museum. Perhaps it would be possible to find another director of another world famous museum, but I doubt if there would be much contrast of ideas.

Boris Piotrovsky could be said to be a "Citizen of the World", one of the few who have travelled more or less everywhere and can say, "I forget they are foreigners. If there were no language difficulties I would never think I was meeting people from other countries."

Directing the Hermitage, probably the world's greatest museum, is no mean feat either. The magnificent building was originally built in the middle of the eighteenth century as the Winter Palace of the Empress Elizabeth in the beautiful new city of St. Petersburg. She died shortly before it was completed, and it was Catherine the Second who immediately on ascending the throne instructed her envoys to purchase vast quantities of works of art to embellish "Her Imperial Majesty's Hermitage". Over the years new buildings were added to house the ever-growing collection of famous paintings and entire collections.

Although the Hermitage dates its life as a museum from 1764, for most of its history admission was limited to the favoured few. All this changed after the October Revolution and today the collection of over two and a half million items is open to the fortunate many.

In the summer of 1941 Boris Piotrovsky returned to Leningrad from his archaeological exploration in Armenia to find empty rooms in the Hermitage. The first stage of the massive evacuation of the delicate and precious works of art had already taken place. Nazi Germany was threatening Leningrad with total destruction.

Whole train loads of exhibits were despatched eastwards, but the evacuation had to stop when, on September 6th, the German bombardment of Leningrad began. From then on, whilst sharing fully in the work of protecting and sustaining life in the beleaguered city, the staff worked constantly to save for posterity the fragile or immovable objects remaining in the museum. Priceless porcelain was buried in sand in the cellar, frescoes and the paintings of the Raphael Loggias were boarded up and protected with sandbags.

Many thousands of people died in Leningrad that winter—from the bombing, from cold and from starvation. The Hermitage was frequently hit by shells, but the dwindling and increasingly feeble Hermitage staff devotedly continued to do everything possible to preserve the exhibits from the lethal effects of exposure, snow, floods and bombardment.

The siege was to last an incredible 900 days, including three winters. At last on January 27th, 1944 Leningrad was liberated amid tremendous rejoicing. Immediately the restoration of the Hermitage began. The evacuated treasures were welcomed back from the Urals and after months of immensely hard work Iosif Orbeli, the Museum's Director, proudly announced on November 5th, 1945 "The Hermitage is open!"

The Hermitage today is so restored to beauty and elegance that, even with sketches drawn during the war, it is difficult to imagine the terrible experiences of those years.

I met Boris Piotrovsky in a stately room containing one of those clocks that rings out melodiously every fifteen minutes. He pre-empted my specially prepared questions by referring to the questionnaire I had sent out in advance. It was the same form sent to all the people with whom meetings were pre-arranged and contained questions like "What are your ambitions?"

At 79 he took the question humorously replying that he was quite happy to remain as Director of the Hermit-

age, whilst not forgetting his other work as a researcher and archaeologist. He has been on the staff since 1933 and Director since 1964. As that was the year of my birth it seems a long time to me! He had kept his working priorities the same—not to be lazy and to get on with his colleagues. I asked him his opinion of foreigners and other nations.

"I have been travelling since student days and met people all over the world. I speak German and so forget that some are foreigners. I greet foreigners like old friends. There is often mutual interest, mutual respect and good relationships. This I appreciate most, as well as sincerity in behaviour, confidence and trust.

"There is sometimes a belief in the West that Russians are afraid of Westerners and unfriendly. Our public attitude confuses people who don't understand our country. I think it is important to read about the country as much as possible.

"In the United Arab Emirates, I was puzzled to find it was offensive to thank friends for a gift. I remember Britain's Princess Diana shocked the people when she kissed a minister in public.

"The more you see, the more you expand your outlook. Everyone should try to expand their outlook on life. We can enrich each other with knowledge and information."

Working at the Hermitage for more than 50 years, how had Boris Piotrovsky seen people's attitude to art change?

"It is my strong opinion that technology and the technological push destroys the soul. People are crueller now, they have less feeling for beauty. I feel strongly that the development of culture is the way to bring nations together. We should educate from childhood and help them to understand the beauty of nature, art, wildlife, and to value human relations.

"We invite as many school children as we can to the Hermitage, and now teachers and kindergarten staff, as well as groups from all walks of life. Visits are more effective than lectures."

Another aspect of world art is, increasingly, its material value. Great art is becoming more and more an investment. At the time of my meeting with Boris Piotrovsky, Van



Gogh's *Sunflower* painting had just been sold for more than 20 million dollars. What was Mr. Piotrovsky's opinion of this?

"It is dangerous for a piece of art to be lost if it goes into a private collection. In the USSR we buy pieces abroad with government assistance—we recently bought an eighteenth century goblet for 800,000 French francs.

"A precondition on the part of the Hermitage is not to declare a work of art has attracted their interest until after they have purchased it. If collectors knew the Hermitage was interested, they would know it is great art, and the bidding would be higher.

"Artists and individuals often give their works as gifts. Chagall cried at the beauty of the museum when he visited and sent us a small work every year.

"There is a strict law in the Soviet Union that if a family possesses a great work of art, it can be passed from generation to generation, but it may only be sold to a museum. There is a slogan, 'Please be careful, collectors, for the Hermitage.'"

"The Hermitage is, of course, an incredible institution but, with more than two million works of art within it, isn't it dangerous to keep so many great works in one place?"

"In terms of accidental damage, we have a team of 42 firemen who walk through the rooms at night, and we have someone looking after each room.

"When Peter Ustinov did some filming here, he said that if these *baboushkas* (old women who look after each room) had been here in 1917, there would have been no revolution!—such was their control over it.

"Additionally we have our militia. Human eyes and smell are more important than electronic alarms.

"There is a proverb among the staff, 'We never leave the Hermitage, we can only be taken out.' When staff die their coffins are laid in state in one of the rooms prior to the funeral, such is the dedication of the place."

## JENNIE SUTTON

During my time in the Soviet Union I met Australians, South Africans, plenty of Americans, even some Scots—down by the Black Sea. But I only met one other British citizen, or former British citizen at least.

Jennie Sutton could be described as unusual, born in India, then training as a teacher, she taught English in Africa and has now lived in Irkutsk for more than thirteen years, travelling back to visit her mother in Sussex once a year.

For me though, Jennie was not so unusual for her travels and lifestyle, but because of her determination to make real something she strongly believes in. Of course she was nothing more than a highly intelligent English woman with the sort of accent that American actors tried to imitate in the '40s and '50s. Exactly the sort of person you expect to find on the fourth floor of a Siberian educational establishment!

Funnily enough you are aware of her presence several floors below as you labour up stairs. The flash cards begin somewhere between the second and third floors. "A rolling stone gathers no moss", "How now brown cow?", "Never give a sucker an even break", and so on. They must have kept international intelligence services guessing for years!

I wasn't the first to track Jennie down, *The Times* had given her a mention many years before, putting her in the wrong place and promoting her a few ranks. Interest had been such that she was asked to contribute a piece about her life in Irkutsk, which was then rejected, the reason given that it was "too dull".

I was passed the article to read by a journalist working in Irkutsk, it wasn't "too dull" at all, it's exactly the sort

of thing that makes interesting Sunday Supplement reading—as is Jennie herself. The “British-Soviet Friendship Society” was probably nearer the mark with their comment, “Certainly there was no anti-Soviet slant in the story, so it never saw the light of day in the Fleet Street newspapers.”\* In fact it was worse than “not anti-Soviet”, it did appear to have a few nice things to say about the people of Irkutsk, and even their way of life. Dangerous stuff indeed!

It is very true that anything that tries to say something positive about the USSR is rarely destined to reach publication in the UK. Even if, as is the case of Jennie Sutton’s article, 99 per cent of it is very natural, human, talking about the beauty of nature in Siberia. Politics are not really mentioned. But some comments cannot be seen in the British press! For example:

“What separates me from England is not so much the vast distance in between which can be crossed in a matter of hours mechanically—but the dreadful gulf in the imagination and understanding which may take decades to bridge. I am convinced that the anti-Soviet propaganda ‘mixture’ in Britain has been effective in one way, more distressing perhaps than any other. It has succeeded in creating a failure to see the man behind the image.”\*\*

Until the British press reaches glasnost there is clearly little hope that such words will ever be printed therein. After all they are clearly damning the very purveyors of anti-Soviet propaganda who requested the piece in the first place—probably naively hoping Jennie would come out with some of her own.

On the other hand there’s no need for the British-Soviet Friendship Society to start blowing trumpets. If Jennie Sutton had written the same honest and intelligent thoughts, but HAD come out with so called “anti-Soviet propaganda”, they would have been the ones not to publish and to ignore her.

“An image,” Jennie says, “no matter how it is created, always conceals the real man behind it. That failure of the imagination comes from the British side, and it has been fixed in people’s minds in a very sophisticated way. We

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\* *British-Soviet Friendship*, London, January, 1984 p. 8

\*\* *Ibidem*.

have all often heard in the West of the accusation that the Russians are always full of suspicion of foreign designs; but, in my own experience, the reaction of British people to Soviet citizens working in or visiting England, and to myself, when I tell them that I am working here, leads me to believe that many people in England are very much more suspicious of 'us'. Why? I think simply because they cannot see the man behind the image...

"By contrast, people I know here are always genuinely eager to extend a warm hand to the English. Here there is a lively interest in other peoples and their culture. People who have spent some time working abroad are inundated with requests for talk on life in those countries. And this is not because, as some may think, people are ignorant and thirst for information because they are not informed by the Soviet media. On the contrary, a tremendous amount is read here."\*

She is right in that. The journalist who first showed me a copy of Jennie's article also showed me a newspaper published regularly which collected unedited articles from the press around the world and published them together. There were even cartoons from *The Sun*.

Jennie's article had been written and published three or four years ago but when I met Jennie the thing that interested me most was her attitude to glasnost, as a person who was not brought up under the Soviet system but has come a part of it from outside. In fact in many ways she spoke as if she had been watching a child grow up, suffering many problems and setbacks but was now on the brink of finally succeeding. Where many of the Soviets I talked to were saying "it must work" with determination, Jennie was seeing the whole thing from the point of view of an enthusiastic friend. And the enthusiasm was very genuine.

"There has been heavy press censorship but now the facts and comments are coming out, you better understand how important that is. It is coming out everywhere and before it would have been called anti-Soviet. Ten years ago you could only hope for a happy ending, now it is real. People are reading the papers now, really reading them, and watching TV. They're crying out for freedom of information, and they're getting it."

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\* *British-Soviet Friendship*, London, January 1984, p. 8

But Jennie Sutton isn't the only foreigner resident in Irkutsk. There's actually an American War veteran there, married to a Soviet woman who loves life in the Siberian forest, hunting and trapping. He's also become a member (honorary) of the local War Veteran's club and swaps stories with his Soviet ex-war buddies.

He was tracked down by the American *People* magazine but didn't express much of an enthusiasm for glasnost. On the contrary he claimed, "I can't watch Soviet TV any more, what they say about America, they have such an awful picture of us, it gives me an ulcer."

What did Jennie think of that?

"Well of course the media here contradicts everything you know. The approach is different here, the criticism is of the government, not the people. People are people here and they are unbelievably tolerant of other people's views.

"It is funny that my friends in England label my friends here as communists or socialists, yet they cannot see that they are capitalists or imperialists. They do not understand in the West how their whole society is shaped directly by these principles. It is the power behind Mrs. Thatcher and the US president.

"In the next few years it will be very exciting as the people in the USSR are finally looking at their history honestly. Real democracy is possible, society is very hopeful. Some people here cannot handle openness, people can no longer dismiss things with 'it had to be like that'. The conservative members of society hold back reform, they are uncomfortable with the new democracy. Such people pose a real danger to the process, but that danger should not be overemphasised. There is a greater understanding, people are not so paranoid about making mistakes now, and when mistakes are made they admit to them and look at how they can be prevented, rather than pretending they haven't happened."

Jennie had just changed departments within the Science Section at the University of Irkutsk. She was now teaching English to post-graduate scientists, enjoying it especially as she was learning a lot of science herself in the process. I had met her shortly before I left Irkutsk after many fruitless attempts to get hold of her—she'd been away for the weekend to the local forest and was busy ordering petrol to pour on her dog to kill the insects it had picked up

there. But she told me she loved the forest, Irkutsk's wooden buildings, the people. She must have been there for almost longer than any other place during her adult life.

"Do you miss anything from England, Jennie?"

"Well, my family of course, and the tennis."

"Do you think you'll be moving on again?"

"No, I'm happy here."

## ON ENVIRONMENT

*"The CPSU Central Committee has underlined that environmental protection efforts in the Soviet Union have not been good enough. Heads of a number of industries have not prevented environmental pollution and have not given sufficient importance to developing wasteless technologies. Heads of ministries have been reminded that they are personally responsible for the problem."*

*Soviet Weekly, July 1987*

*"The conclusion we draw from the Chernobyl accident is that in the further development of the scientific and technological revolution, issues concerning the reliability and safety of technical equipment are of the utmost significance. The strictest possible requirements are needed in everything, and everywhere. This will minimise the probability of accidents."*

*USSR. 100 Questions and Answers,  
1986*

Individual opinion varies on the likelihood of a global nuclear war, the world's consciousness is largely concentrated on this. Yet perhaps a greater danger of destruction is happening all the time as the world's industrial nations masochistically pump more and more poisons into the air, slowly eroding basic natural protectors. Apart from the nuclear power issue, only a small part of the population is fully aware of the dangers, the issues have not yet been fully publicised, at least not in Britain I know. They are so fundamentally linked to our way of life. Trying to reverse the trend would undoubtedly mean many major sacrifices in what some call progress, others call greed.

Novosti, surprisingly, does not have a bad word to say

about the USSR's environmental contributions. Though producing 20 per cent of world industrial output it has contributed only 10 per cent to pollution, and this is not linked to the fact that it is a geographically huge country, around half of which is virtually unpopulated.

In fact the Soviet Union does, under glasnost, seem to be making a far greater effort towards environmental protection than before, and indeed than most other countries. Public awareness is being raised, unlike in Britain where public awareness is subverted where possible. On the other hand only a year after Chernobyl *Soviet Weekly* was publishing huge colour features with spectacular pictures of space-age designed nuclear power stations, boasting that 18 new projects are under way, and states that their "design guarantees, as far as is humanly possible, absolute safety". Some guarantee! I simply cannot see how permanent poisoning of a large part of the earth and cumulative damage to the world's atmosphere can be worth the extra mega-watts.

The damage to the environment in my own country and the world is publicised by Greenpeace, who rarely have a good thing to say about any one nation.

Relations between the USSR and Greenpeace appear to be strained at the best of times. Then again Greenpeace rarely gets on with any of the world's major industrial powers. The British send its members to prison for "vandalism" or similar, though in real terms Greenpeace are publicising environmental damage, the French blew up their ship *Rainbow Warrior* a few years ago when it was protesting against their nuclear testing.

The publicised confrontations between Greenpeace and the USSR have come over whale and seal killings by the USSR. In the past Greenpeace accusations have been denied, now the USSR claims to have finished whaling altogether—depleting of stocks being blamed on "rapacious whaling chiefly by the United States, Britain and Norway at the turn of the century" according to *Soviet Weekly*.

I had hoped to get some Greenpeace comment on my interview with Dr. Grigory Galazy, an extremely nice man with whom I had one of the most enjoyable and stimulating discussions during the trip—over tea and cakes in the Irkutsk House of Friendship. Unfortunately Greenpeace proved hard to get a response out of (contrary to previous experience),



but I think the interview with Dr. Galazy stands up on its own.

I asked him first about his work.

"I am the Director of the Limnological Institute on Lake Baikal and have been for thirty years. Limnology is the study of lakes and Baikal is the biggest in the world—so it is a Mecca for limnologists. It contains 20 per cent of the world's fresh water and is 20 million years old, it's the oldest lake in the world. It's also one of the deepest, more than one and a half kilometres. Baikal has never mixed with any other water stocks, all of its flora and fauna were created in or by the lake and never brought from anywhere else, so of the 2,600 living organisms in the area more than two thirds are unique to Baikal. Waters are extremely pure, it can be screened to a depth of 40 metres. The organisms that live in the water endure very harsh conditions and contribute to its pureness. They live in water temperature layers and would all die if the temperature changed, this is only possible in the first 250 metres depth, beneath that the change is minimal, conditions are very severe.

"The quantity of water is estimated at  $23,000 \text{ km}^3$ . If man was deprived of the rest of the world's fresh water the world's population could survive on Baikal for 40 years, the population of the USSR for 1,000 years. Therefore the lake is not the property of the Soviet Union but of the whole world. In 1985 the United Nations gave an order to the National Academy of the USSR to preserve the fauna and flora around Baikal. Since then there has been a very great effort."

"Pollution of Lake Baikal has, I think, the unique status of having reached British TV twice in the past couple of years. Once on a nature conservation programme, and once on the national news because of environmental measures being taken to protect the lake from pollution. But I remember the measures being described as "too little, too late", is this true?"

"No, not quite true. If Baikal had been polluted it would be impossible to rehabilitate the lake. The Great Lakes in the USA serve as a bad example, they have been polluted for fifty years and they are now trying to rehabilitate them, but are not sure if it will be successful.

"Anything that penetrates water takes 400 years to get out again. Besides all these organisms form a natural balance and if some are destroyed then the balance goes and the

chain collapses. There are two cellulose factories on Baikal lake's shores which have polluted it. A civil campaign was launched and people expressed protest at the destruction. The first industry involved tried to assure the population that there was no threat to nature, but when the factory began operating the waters began dying. This raised the alarm and after the 27th Congress of the Communist Party, extreme measures were taken to prevent the destruction. With glasnost the protests were put into a wider scale campaign in the public eye.

"Scientists told their version of events to writers and journalists and now virtually every citizen takes more care with the environment. I insisted that the production at the factories on Baikal should stop and on April 13, 1987 the government signed a decree to change the factories to furniture manufacture with no polluting output."

"Are there any other factories dumping waste in Baikal?"

"The two cellulose factories created 70 per cent of the polluting waste. By closing these down it stops any major deterioration in standards. Environmentalists believe the other factories, dealing with fish, baking and confectionary are not dangerous, their waste can be purified.

"One idea is to pour waste into a closed space so the liquids evaporate. A system is also being developed to save the air from pollution through electric heating. The problem is that the air over the lake can be polluted from cities. Coal and gas resources will last long enough before the movement towards electric heating is completed. We do not have nuclear power but hydro power in this area. Nuclear power is very dangerous and we don't want the stations, we have enough hydro power and hope this will prove to be enough until a better form of energy than nuclear is found."

"How long did the factories operate before they were changed to non-toxic waste production?"

"Twenty years. All that time there was a great effort on the part of the people to get things changed. They are changing from cellulose manufacture in 1990."

"In general it seems that the Soviet Union has a poor record in terms of environmental protection, at least that is the opinion we get in Britain. Could you comment on this?"

"It is possible now to cover any event, satellites can screen even a single car. Modern equipment can discover anything using infra-red waves. I am not sure if the physical conflicts

with Greenpeace and similar organisations are true or not. The common goal of mankind should be to save the world. I think we will reach agreement on nuclear weaponry but this is not enough. We must reach agreement on protecting the environment. All countries should come together for this.

"I do not think it is fair to say the Soviet Union is worse than other countries. If we are to blame each other I could name Great Britain as a major polluter, statistics have shown that the discharge of dust is spreading over 500 kilometres from British territory, destroying life in more than 16,000 lakes and rivers. Acid rain is extremely dangerous."

"But do you feel the Soviet Union is doing enough on it's part?"

"Well I can give the example of internal worries, and world public opinion culminating in a ban on the expanding capacities of nuclear power plants, or expanding the production of plants themselves. Everyone should realise that this will result in a cut of a substantial amount of power, or at least it will be manufactured by safer means.

"It's therefore extremely important to orientate public opinion to put pressure on governments so that more money is spent on research into safer forms of nuclear synthesis (between hydrogen and helium) than into manufacturing armaments. England was the first nation to have the knowledge to create nuclear synthesis, now there is a Soviet proposed international research project called TOKOMAK which will provide industrial implementation of synthesis.

"It is planned to build the first plant within the next ten years. The emphasis is on making it an international project. All nations involved have greeted the project as a necessary step forward. It costs a huge amount of money and can only progress if as many nations as possible channel funds."

"Do you think the Soviet Union is doing as much as it should to protect the environment?"

"Well it will in future projects. The purification process here is better than in Sweden or England but is not enough to stop all pollution. There are no 'safe' factories producing waste and all involved should come together to organise projects of research into making things safer.

"The USSR is doing as much as or more than the rest of the world in this area. We lead the world in the conversion of coal to gas, in certain parts of the metal working and in chemical industries. In other fields we are not so advanced.

We are not satisfied with the results we have achieved to date however."

"What about charges made against Soviet whaling?"

"An International Commission was established recently so that we can protect species in that part of the world. I am not experienced in that field but I certainly hope they will do their upmost to ban whaling.

"I don't think the government is fully aware of what is being done in certain areas. Managers often say that everything is alright, but later they find out that they're not."

"Are there no checks on industry to see if their claims are true?"

"We have an organisation called, Goskomhydrymet, a government body and state committee on environmental control—it checks hydrology and meteorology."

"Is it enough?"

"My personal opinion is no. We have other establishments, so it's government supervision, checks on sanitation on a national scale that must do the work. We have supervision of fishing industries, and a further body called Minvodhoz which is the Ministry of Water Supply and Fertilisation."

"But there is still illegal pollution, whale hunting and so on. If these organisations are designed to stop this, why does it happen?"

"It is mandatory for an organisation to report what it is doing. If it fails to do so then those responsible are prosecuted."

"The impression we are given is that, like other major industrial powers, the USSR operates the short-sighted view of putting the economy, high production and so on, before the protection of a species, or the environment in general?"

"Formerly this was true. Recently however, for example with whales, an international treaty was signed for their protection. No project can now be signed or go ahead if it does not have environmental facilities. None of the projects can be given the go ahead unless signed. Environmental protection was included in the last Soviet Constitution, it obliges all citizens to work for environmental protection, there is a legal charge against those who do not."

"How does the treaty limit whaling?"

"The number hunted is limited to the numbers being born. It has resulted in a reduction in the number of whaling fleets in recent years."

(*Author's note:* Shortly after talking to Dr. Galazy, *Soviet Weekly* published a report that all Soviet whaling had ceased.)

"There is a growing feeling among many people in Britain that not only should nuclear power be abandoned but that the untold damage to the environment caused by other forms of pollution will poison the world to such an extent that in the future it will die whether we blow it up or not. They feel, therefore, that all forms of major industrial production that has a toxic waste should cease, regardless to the obvious economic chaos that would follow. What are your opinions on this?"

"I would say that I support people with this idea. All that is done should be of benefit to the people. If 75 per cent of people were against nuclear power stations for example, nuclear power stations would not be built. They are dangerous and I argue against them."

"So the majority of Soviet people are in favour of nuclear power?"

"We don't know how many people are in favour and how many against."

"If, as you say, 75 per cent of the population is against nuclear power, or might be and if they were, then production would stop. It seems a bit strange that there is no way of measuring to see if 75 per cent of the population are against it or not?"

"I agree."

"What are your impressions of Greenpeace?"

"I regret I don't know their programme in detail, but from what I do know I think their activities should be supported by as many individuals and countries as possible. The USSR does not participate in Greenpeace but I think many people hope for their aims, in their hearts at least."

"In the UK Greenpeace is not allowed to place TV adverts attacking the nuclear industry whilst the nuclear industry is freely allowed to promote itself. Is this situation similar in the Soviet Union?"

"There has been no public discussion, but there have been articles and TV programmes on this. My opinion is that if we had a national survey the majority of the population would be against nuclear power. I think the ministries involved in debate try to enlighten the debate in favour of construction but ecologists do have their voice."

"Finally then, do you think people, say 100 years in the future, will be happy with what we've done, largely with full knowledge of our actions to their planet? I mean even when we don't know the full consequences of our action, we at least know that we don't know, and that they're likely to be dangerous, but we still do the damage."

"I believe in the reason of mankind. I hope that future generations will inherit the planet from us in a condition, not better than now, but certainly not worse. I hope people will be wise enough to stop nuclear power and bombs, and that environmental pollution will be stopped.

"Current measures are not enough so mankind should take much more care of its industrial effort, otherwise the situation on the globe will continue towards catastrophe. We already invest huge amounts of money to purify water and stop pollution, but this is not enough.

"So we fight against fire. We need to concentrate our efforts. We waste money on nuclear weapons. Our task is to prevent the very possibility of destruction. We should find a way to balance the relationship between people and the environment. The only way is to know how to live, how to act. We cannot change laws of nature, we should only adapt ourselves.

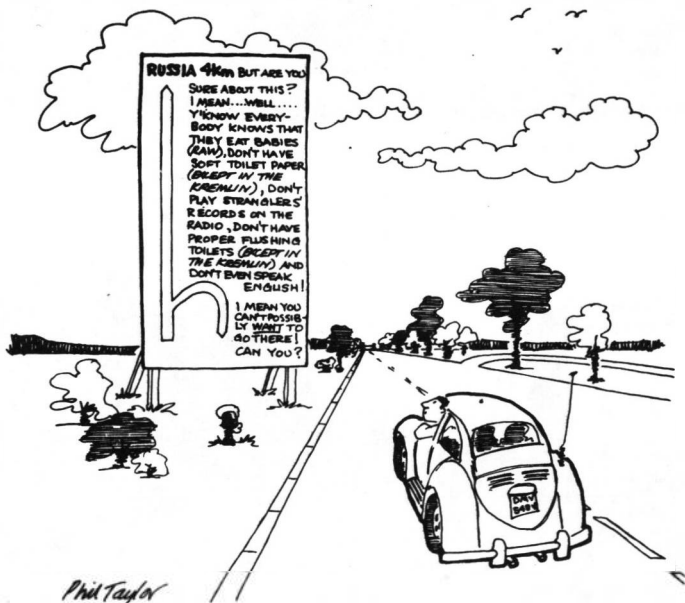
"We can compare this with our medical health system, we should have a hospital for the world."

CO! WELL, I WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED THAT IF IT WASN'T HERE IN THE DAILY FIB!



Phil Taylor

Happy Scribble



Phil Taylor

Happy Scribble



Peking Hotel in Mayakovsky Square, Moscow







View of Moscow from the Kremlin

Karl Marx Prospekt in Moscow



Nevsky Prospekt in Leningrad

Advertisement for ski holidays from Balkan Tourist, Astoria Hotel, Leningrad





Piskarev Cemetery in Leningrad

The S. M. Kirov Elektrosila Factory in Leningrad



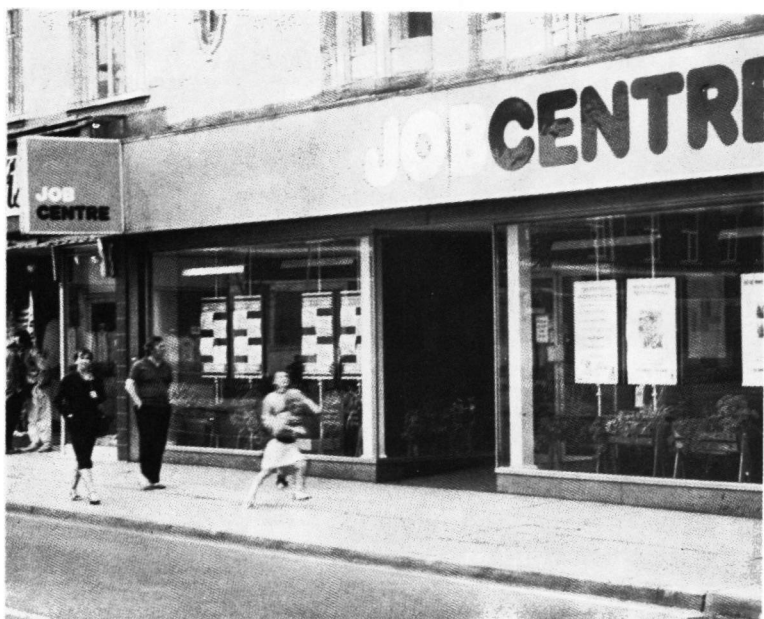


English terraced housing



Bank offer customers computer cards with which they can withdraw their savings (and borrow money) through well-mounted computers

Plenty of Ladas for sale in Britain



A job centre

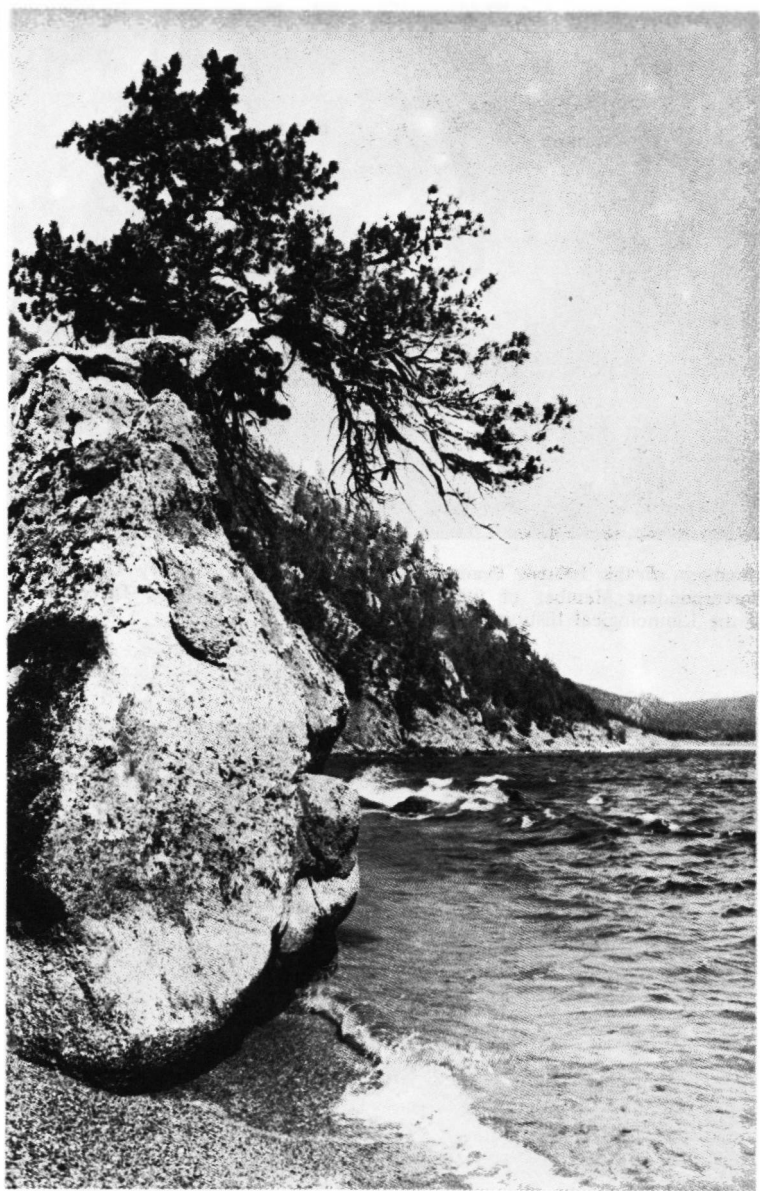




Home of one of Britain's wealthier citizens

A British telephone with local decoration





On the shores of Lake Baikal



Members of the Irkutsk Peace Committee, including Grigory Galazy, Correspondent Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Director of the Limnological Institute





An old wooden church in Irkutsk

A Siberian log hut



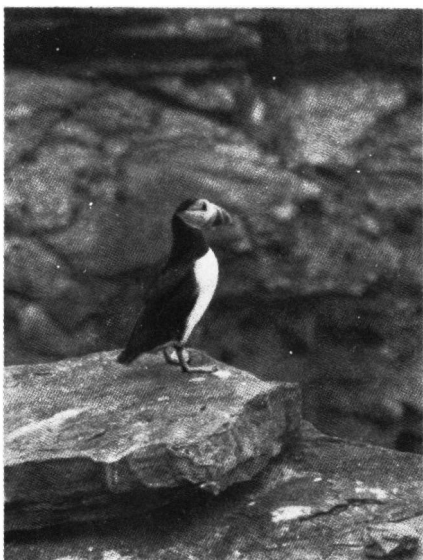


Siberian sheep

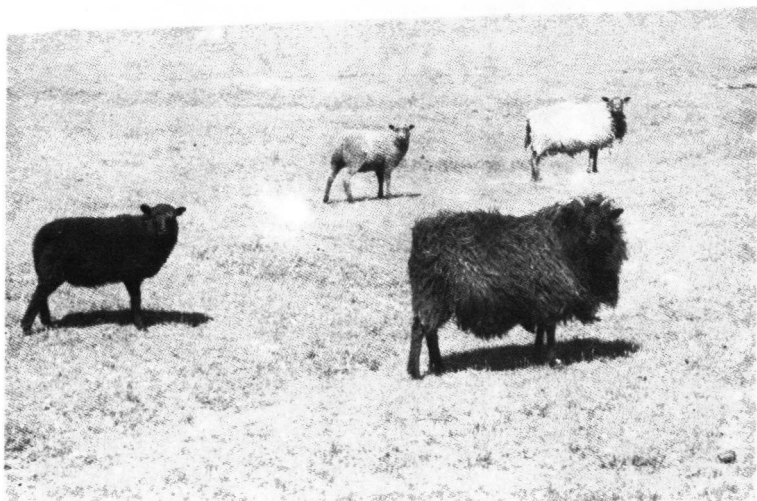


Ludmila Moiseeva on the farm  
where she works

The puffin, found on Great Britain's Northern Coast and the Soviet Pacific Coast



Shetland sheep





English country church



English country graveyard



English country pub (across the road from the church)



Posters calling for disarmament and preservation of Lake Baikal



Charity organisations use advertising to raise money for the world's poor



People living near to one another are encouraged to watch over each other's homes as crime increases. The government's "Home Watch" scheme is particularly popular in the wealthier areas





My friends Nikolai and Zinaida Velm in Irkutsk after a great  
Sunday lunch



Old meets new in Irkutsk

Vladimir Muravyov, construction worker in a Siberian snow storm  
(June)





Jenny Sutton, a school teacher of the English language. Irkutsk

Journalist school, Irkutsk State University





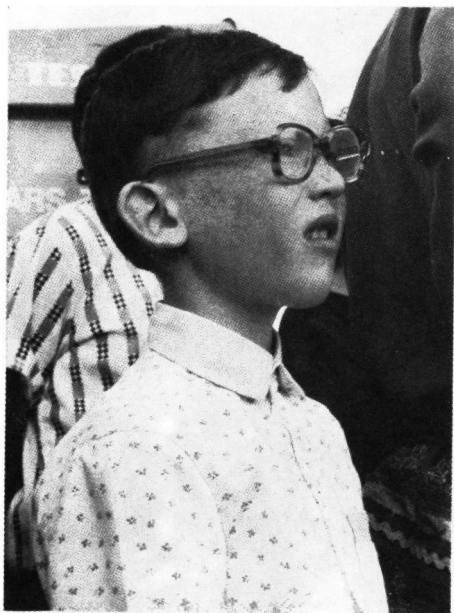
Siberian veterans at an Irkutsk festival



Traditional Buryat costume  
at a festival in Irkutsk



A flower seller at Irkutsk market



A young onlooker



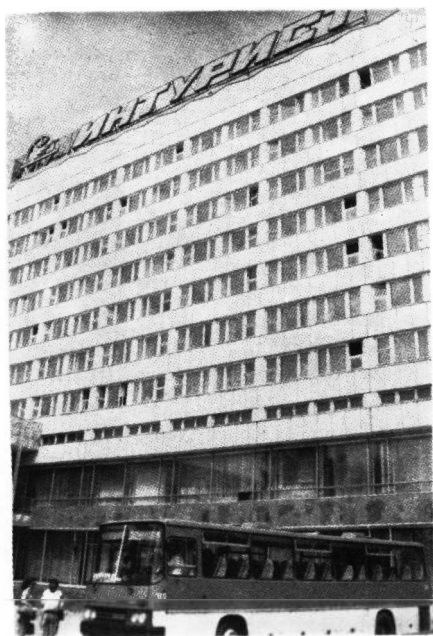
Road safety is taught in school playgrounds

Children help to clean schools during their holidays. Irkutsk





Khabarovsk High Street



The Intourist hotel  
in Khabarovsk



Raisa Tyagunova (*right*) and Stalina Latisheva, pig farm workers in the Khabarovsk Territory



Lenin makes it big in Khabarovsk



View of Sochi from  
the Black Sea



Zhemchuzhina Hotel in Sochi





Dagomys Intourist Complex

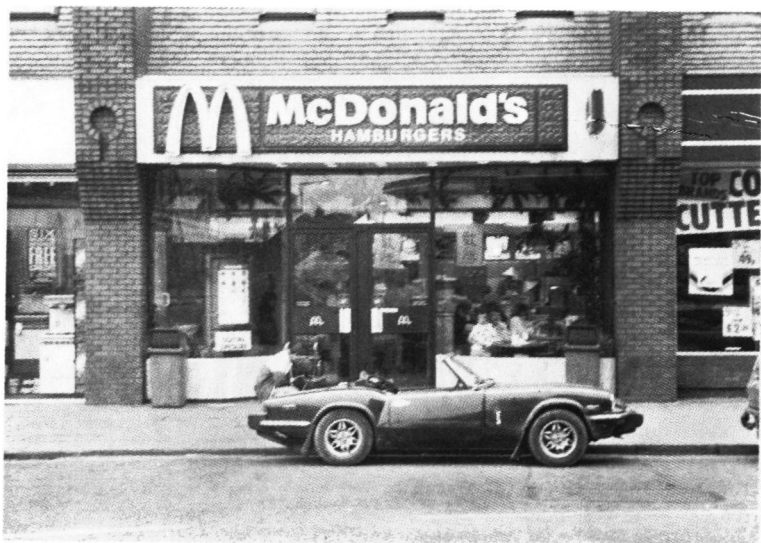


Sheremetyevo International Airport



Happy Scribble

*Phil Taylor.*



A branch of McDonalds, two are now open in Moscow, one for currency holders, one for Muscovites

British sexshop selling pornographic material, pornographic magazines, newspapers and video tapes are available from many sources in the UK





Games hall in England



Post box



Statue of Eros, London's Piccadilly

## THE WRITER, THE ARTIST AND THE JOURNALIST

*"With us, writers see it as their job to oppose government, as unorthodox people who are in combat with the bourgeoisie, with those who will not speak the truth, with hypocrisy and with secrecy, which is my own obsession. We think that the primary usefulness of writers is in acting as correctors to government. For example, while writers could not get Americans into the Vietnam war, they helped to get them out! Each society must decide what price it can afford to pay to have writers play that correcting role in the name of the people. Probably many problems in your past which you are now examining might never have occurred if your writers had been free to criticise them."*

*(John le Carre, in interview with Soviet writers, during a 1987 visit to the USSR, reported in Soviet Weekly.)*

Writing may be my own profession but I wasn't about to go into the details of socialist realism, the art form that is supposed to govern all writers and artists in the USSR.

You can look it up in the library easily enough but, briefly, socialist realism was defined in a statute of the Union of Writers dated 1932, "The basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism demands of the artist the truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic representation of reality must be linked with the task of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism."

Critics, mainly Western and Soviet dissidents, claim that the "art form" is restricting, artificial, censorship, limiting, contrived, boring, declaratory and unconvincing. Novosti disagree, but there are texts on both sides which analyse

both in favour and against. My interests were more with the practicalities of working as an artist.

My writer is Yuri Naghibin, whom I met early on in Moscow during the early days of my trip. My head was still reeling from the onslaught of culture shocks and reversals of that which I had previously taken for granted. Still a luxury apartment within a rather tatty looking block of flats was another surprise. Not that Mr. Naghibin is there much. He spends the majority of his time at his country residence with the services of his chauffeur, or abroad, whilst his maid takes care of the Moscow apartment with its valuable book collection, beautiful antique writing desk and Sony video system.

Mr. Naghibin is medium height, full head of white hair (he is 67), plump and deaf in one ear following his participation in the Great Patriotic War as news correspondent of workers' paper *Trud*. He writes novels on war, children, the environment and other subjects of interest. His book sales top twenty million. Additionally a script writer for film including Cannes Grand Prix winning *The Girl and Echo* and Oscar winning *Dersu Uzala*. He has travelled all over the world and continues to do so, has lectured in 36 US states, written books on many great writers including Pushkin, Hemingway and is currently completing *An Unwritten Story by Somerset Maugham* at the request of Maugham himself, prior to his death.

In short, a literary hero by all standards. Feeling rather intimidated (!), I launched into my stunning array of questions.

"You're obviously successful, but how does a Soviet writer get started?"

"There's no standard answer, the 1950s/60s were favourable for writers—few faced problems joining the Russian publishing houses. But in recent years, the past decade, young writers have faced problems in becoming national writers, soon I hope this will change. I cannot think of a person aged under 40 who has made a breakthrough in Soviet literature. The fate of young Soviet writers has never been as difficult as it is now. I come across many talented writers who have problems in creative work. They are unable to join the Union of Writers."

"Why are they blocked?"

"They are more open, they write more painstakingly,



confidently. The older generation is not so uncompromising, or dramatic. The younger generation are perhaps braver, but they are also less cunning. But this is changing. More writers are now being published.

"There is a second reason, in my opinion, there is a group of writers who have published many volumes and won many prizes. They monopolise the business. Now there is fighting within the Union of Writers. At the twentieth congress it was made clear that people saw the situation as negative, the monopolisers were openly criticised. The criticism was made public. In short this now means that all those in official departments and publishing houses must think about what they publish, they can no longer afford to be above criticism."

"We're given the impression in Britain that Soviet writers reiterate national policy, that if they do not tow the line they must go underground?"

"This was true in the days of Stalin, people were imprisoned for writing things considered counter-revolutionary. But restructuring and renewal makes it possible to write on all subjects except pornography. The times now are totally different from the past."

"Do you think the current freedom is real and lasting then, or will it return to the way it was in the past?"

"Only Greek prophets can predict the future, but I cherish the hope in my soul and mind that such freedom is on the way. It would be a catastrophe if things failed now."

"In the West it is difficult to start as a writer, to be published you must have a name, to get a name you must be published. New writers are paid little. How does it work in the Soviet Union?"

"There are two main ways. First the easy way is to get into the Gorky Institute of Literature. Here they are tutored by experienced writers and teaching staff who support them in sending material to publishers.

"The second, and harder way is not to get support from anyone, live the regular life of a citizen and write when you can; get a break when you can. There are other forms of help, a literature fund which supports writers prior to publication of their work, but must be repaid. There are houses of creative work in the countryside and writers can receive vouchers to go and work there, but again money spent must be repaid. There are however special two week courses at such country houses at which young writers can produce

short stories and the best are chosen by existing successful writers to be helped as future writers. A collection of writings from such seminars used to be published, but regrettably is not any longer."

"You travel widely, is there any place in the world you have particularly liked?"

"It is difficult to say there are so many beautiful places—maybe Tuscany, Florence, the villages by the Loire in France, small English towns in Britain—Oxford, Stratford, also the Grand Canyon in the USA. But not the big American cities. I like history, memories, renaissance. I like London. It is a beautiful city. I love the Thames embankment, you can feel Dickens there. It has different faces, it is big, great and diversified. There was a time when it was number one. I love the galleries and museums with Constable and Turner, double decker buses, trees, Hyde Park. The only place I don't like is the underground, I feel claustrophobic."

"Are there any things you'd like to see in the USSR that you see outside? And vice versa."

"Well the major thing I'd like to see from outside is now coming true, freedom of speech. I'd also like to see freedom of travel, people cannot be fully rounded in character if they do not travel. I'd also like to see some night life here—I don't mean prostitutes, but 20 years ago we had a night life, now everything is dead at 8 p.m. It's crazy.

"I would also like a good car. The cars produced go from bad to worse. I am tortured by car problems. I would like to drive without having to think that the car will break down at any moment. There are other things too, but I won't go on.

"What I would like to see exported from the USSR is our passion for the arts and our lack of greed. TV in the Soviet Union has failed to kill the individual's love of reading, not just intellectuals but all people."

"We are told that people read in the USSR because the TV is so boring. Do you not think that if Soviets have the freedom to travel they will become more Westernised and lose their love of books and art to an extent?"

"Millions of people travel abroad and they do not turn to capitalism after seeing a bare bum at the Lido."

"You say millions of people have travelled abroad?"

"Yes, for example a woman who works in the dairy by my country house has visited Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria

and other places, so has my chauffeur. We have Mediterranean cruises each with thousands of passengers."

"But is it not privileged group who travel abroad, to the West?"

"I was in a trade union group that visited France and Morocco. Membership was mixed, besides countries like Cuba and Hungary are similar to the West, they do not penetrate social life like the USSR. They have striptease."

"So how are people chosen to go and how do they pay?"

"Everyone can afford to go if they save a little while, the further they go the more it costs. Trips are state subsidised, they used to be partly supported by the unions but not any longer. The further you wish to go the more it costs."

"Forgive me, but I believed that Soviets only take holidays every 4/5 years and then only in the USSR" (general laughter).

"Every Soviet organisation has a trade union to whom you may apply for tickets. Any Soviet citizen can do this. I should mention that there is the currency problem. For example the number of Soviet people visiting Britain is about equal to the British who visit the USSR in number, because we need the hard cash."

"So why do you need freedom of travel? It sounds like you already have it."

"As I say there is a limited number of places, also the unions only organise trips to a limited number of destinations each year. For example, this year I would like to go to Japan but our Union only goes to Greece and some other places. Such limitations bar the satisfaction of the will. I would like to be able to just fly anywhere."

"But surely then you are closer to Western society, where people can fly more or less anywhere but can't afford it."

"This is a problem with your society. We can afford it but there are not the flights, you have the flights but cannot afford to fly."

"You are clearly very well off. Maybe the equivalent of a successful businessman in Britain, you have servants, two or more homes, valuable possessions. How does this tally with the communist principle of equality when other citizens have to share homes?"

"Socialism does not provide social equality. The idea is, 'From everyone according to his ability, to everyone accord-

ing to his labour.' If a person works hard they can gain wealth, everyone can buy a car, a garden, an apartment. There are no restrictions. I speak of the labours of scientists and scholars who are rated highly, I have greater opportunities than an engineer. In general terms writers are low paid."

"But isn't this capitalism? Survival of the toughest, the rich get richer and so on?"

"This is your opinion. You are paid according to your labour. Do you believe a talented and gifted writer who sells great books in millions should have the same wealth as the talentless?"

"The system does allow the successful to succeed, but also the Union of Writers have those with no success. Personally I believe those that fail should be allowed to do so, support withdrawn."

"But is this not the same as the West?"

"The difference is that there are many parasite artists, writers, musicians created through the generosity of socialism. This is overkill."

And with that thought we leave Mr. Naghibin and travel to Irkutsk where a local journalist, who submitted news for publication around the world answered questions on the Soviet media. Is there a controlled press in the USSR? Could he write what he liked?

"It's difficult to comment as I don't feel any suppression. As an example if *The Guardian* asked me to write a piece on Lake Baikal I would make my statement and give my opinion of the problems of pollution. The words are not changed and no one blames me for my personal opinion."

"The mass media is subordinate to party bodies, the local press here is subordinate to the Irkutsk regional committee of the Communist Party. We lay emphasis on the tasks and problems put forward by government organisations. One of these is to guarantee individual housing for all by the year 2000. It is mandatory for the mass media to promote these plans. One way is to criticise bureaucrats who are not moving fast enough or even deliberately slowing down the process. If a proposal is not supported by the population the newspaper's letters column reflects this. Soviet papers have a far larger receipt of letters than any other media in the world. Letters are passed on to those responsible and commented on."

"But aren't there things that papers like *Pravda* did not report?"

"This is true. Gorbachev said we need restructuring and he said that means everybody. He emphasised there must be no people or organisations who could be excluded from criticism. Every day new problems are now published and exposed. Glasnost is good for the world, not just the Soviet Union. It frightens world governments."

"What is your opinion of English newspapers?"

"Scientifically speaking the quality of print and journalism is high. Competition is a prime-mover. Politically speaking, *The Guardian* or *The Times* are much the same, the majority of papers follow a similar policy against the Soviet Union. I respect *The Financial Times* for exact, scrupulous writing, and for direct comment on events. However I can give instances where *The Guardian* published a piece on the Soviet Union that was misinformed and written in a negative style."

"Do the major Soviet papers report the same things from the same angle then?"

"Of course not. The major papers are *Izvestia*, *Trud*, *Pravda* and *Sovietskaja Rossia*. They all publish official statements by Gorbachev and world leaders but then they give a different angle to each other and report different things; sometimes quite the opposite."

"What are your opinions of *The Sun*, *Star*, *Mirror*, *Mail*, *Express* and similar, read by three quarters of British newspaper purchasers?"

"These papers do not really contain news but speculation and entertainment, maybe about film stars lives. They are full of information that is of no actual value. As journalists we feel they have lower standards, the focus is on basic emotions and sentiments rather than intelligence. They of course do their utmost to attack the USSR and deliver illogical anti-Soviet propaganda. We do not expect them to be objective."

"Are there any Soviet equivalents?"

"No. Firstly they're private, secondly their approach to news is not in keeping with that in the USSR."

And so quickly on to our third representative from the world of Soviet realism, based in Leningrad, the artist Yevgeny Malishev who lives in an apartment of not dissimilar proportions to Mr. Naghibin. Rather less luxurious and at

least half used as a studio. His art work I, as a novice, thought excellent. But how did the artist work in the USSR?

"There are two ways, firstly we work for exhibitions, which are purely from internal inspiration in most cases. The second is that we may be commissioned to create a piece by an establishment. These are funded by the art material fund and the institution involved. I am currently working on two paintings commissioned by a factory, there's a total of 8 to be done. These are based on the Solovetsky islands with many churches and cathedrals. But orders vary and they come from all over the country—this a major source of earnings for painters and artists. The Ministry of Culture supervises distribution to museums of work that has not been commissioned. There is also the Union of Artists which has existed for 55 years and has 20,000 members, 2,000 in Leningrad. This includes amateurs who have the right to work in streets or town squares."

"How have you progressed as an artist and how is your work inspired?"

"I graduated from the Leningrad Academy of Arts in 1955, then I joined the Union. One of my major subjects is now involved with modern life and social issues. In my work I travel all over the country, visiting 15 republics of the USSR, it gives me a chance to broaden my image of the country. Naturally I felt an interest towards foreign life too, so I travel abroad to Africa, Europe and the USA. I recently visited Spain. It was of major importance to see the art in the museums there, it is important to establish links with different artists. We receive many artists from abroad and organise exhibitions of their work, recently from Finland, Poland, the GDR and other places. We're currently planning a joint exhibition with the USA. Interaction of wide ranging ideas is very important to me."

"What about young artists? How do they get started?"

"We have problems with young painters. Many finish at schools every year but it is difficult for the Union to provide enough work for them at a reasonable level. This has been discussed in the national media, I believe state planning is wrong, it is difficult for a young artist to join the Union. All divisions of the Union do have young artists sections which assist people aged up to 35 with getting orders, organising workshop and required travel. They help to organise exhibitions of young painters. The Moscow Union of Young

Artists have 1200 members, there's about 300 in Leningrad. At least half of all artists have to teach as a source of their salary."

"When work is commissioned do people ask for a specific artist?"

"Normally the order is completed through the Union who choose the artist, occasionally a specific artist is requested. Any tourist can buy a painting as well, many of the galleries have works of art for sale. Businesses and galleries buy in a special salon. Japanese firms buy a lot of work."

"How do the better artists benefit in the USSR?"

"The upper and lower wage difference is substantial due to the amount of orders. About 100 artists receive more than 1,000 roubles per month. The average pay is 322 roubles but from that an artist must pay for the running of his workshop as well as the trips which are normally of importance to his work. Highly merited persons receive incomparably high wages, figures are not publicised, but payment can reach millions of roubles for major projects such as a major memorial. From the total the artist must pay for material and a construction team."

"Have you ever been restricted in your work? Do you feel restricted by the mood of the state or for commercial reasons?"

"It is no secret that we had trouble in painting drama, but literature was effected more than painting by such restrictions. The reasons for this are that the leadership do not understand art or its purpose, they banned works of literature, films were shelved and some works of art too.

"Now we have a process that helps art to bloom, previously banned material can be published or seen. Federo Branhoff, a friend of mine, created a work putting forward the problems of life in a village. He received drastic criticism 20 years ago when he first made his work, but today his works are seen to be classics. He was and still is a prominent writer.

"We live now in an interesting atmosphere when writers, poets and artists are solving the problems of different kinds of creative work. Problems were publicised in the Union of Artists congress at which the government and Gorbachev were present. He showed great interest. Our responsibility is for the time we live in now, it's problematic, interesting, creative."

"Soviet art is rarely seen in the West, by the general public at least, except as harsh often violent images in wall murals and posters, often memorials to the last war, or to promote the idea of socialist construction. What is your opinion of these works?"

"Mostly when I recollect monuments and murals I can hardly think of any that are threatening. There is no aggressive emphasis in most monuments. If you visit any exhibition you'll see no aggressive images, the emphasis is laid on different humane problems.

"The Union of Artists now has the task of removing all red and white plaques. These are not made by artists or painters, they have nothing to do with our art. The Union of Artists have objected to the Communist Party for stopping our plans to put up big new plaques to commemorate the October revolution, our feeling is that beauty is our best propaganda."

"How often is there a Union congress?"

"Every five years. 800 people come from around the country so it is not easy to organise, but other major problems not dealt with in congress are dealt with by the Secretariat meeting every two or three years. The Union's leadership meet every week."

"What are your feelings about the way Western influences can affect the USSR? Both generally and in terms of art?"

"Well firstly I think we need to improve our economy, management methods, these are the central tasks. From that point of view Western experiences are valuable. Foreign correspondents on newspapers often comment on organisation in Japan. I hope we will benefit from other nations' experience.

"In terms of art my strong feeling is that the choice of Western artists to use abstract brought all painting down a blind alley. On the other hand Russian culture has maintained a rich tradition and I think visiting Westerners benefit from this.

"Many pictures in the West nowadays could be described as 'gloomy'. It is a tragedy to lose the art as a form of implementation of a person's expressions. I believe that such art is not successful and that few people visit the galleries, which is proof that people don't like it."



PART FOUR.

**GENERAL**

## WOMEN IN THE SOVIET UNION

*"The modern feminist movement stems from the middle of the 1960s in North America, and perhaps a little later in Europe, although important political feminist activities (for example, the Suffragette Movement in Britain), long pre-date the contemporary phenomenon. There is no political doctrine of feminism per se and the various groups and currents of thought amongst feminists are often in bitter disagreement. At the root, the movement seeks equal political and social rights for women as compared with men. The main common theoretical assumption which is shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been an historical tradition of male exploitation of women, stemming originally from the sexual differences which led to a division of labour, as, for example, in child-rearing practices."*

David Robertson, *A Dictionary of Modern Politics*, 1985

*"Securing living and working conditions for women that would enable them to successfully combine their maternal duties with active involvement in labour and public activity is a prerequisite for solving many family problems. In the 12th five-year-plan period we are planning to extend the practice of letting women work a shorter day or week, or to work at home."*

From the *Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee of the 27th Party Congress*

This section is perhaps incorrectly titled "Women in the USSR" because it deals specifically with how Soviet women react to the principles of modern feminism—a movement which is becoming increasingly influential in the West, affecting the attitude and lives of the majority of women, to a greater or lesser extent. As the Penguin guide says, the main principle involved is the improvement of women's rights in a male-dominated world. There are a vast number of ways in which women's rights could be improved, but the traditional ones are: equal rights to vote, equal rights to work and equal pay, and a sharing of the unpaid labour involved in running a house and bringing up children.

The history of women's rights in both East and West are usually deemed to have begun "officially" in the last century when women in Britain (for example), did not exist as "persons" as such under the law, but as part of a father or husband's property. In marriage the woman's body, earnings, children and labour were the possession of the husband. Men could, in fact, use force to keep their wives in the house and thus the ideology of male protectiveness not only debased women (and still does) but naturally put the interests of the male first, in the guise of placing the woman first.

Meanwhile rules forbidding women's education in areas such as medicine were claimed to be due to a respect for ladies' delicate nature (therefore a lady, said the men, would not want to be cutting up dead men's bodies, and so on).

In nineteenth century Russia conditions for women were devoid of all humanity. Serf women were mistreated by their families and landlords, and exhausted by endless pregnancies and work in the fields. After Tsar Alexander's emancipation of the serfs in 1861, many families were bankrupt and unmarried daughters could no longer be supported. In the 1860s and 70s thousands left for the towns where they suffered public persecution and police harassment, whilst struggling to live on their own terms.

They demanded the right to education and set up self-educating groups and work co-operatives. Many lived communally in great poverty, cropped their hair and walked the streets, smoking and unescorted. The press denounced them as nihilists.

In the 1890s the exodus from fields to factories was vast,

and Marxists realised it was here that revolution could and would occur. Women from the new radical intelligentsia supported female aspirations and sacrificed middle-class comforts to help educate working women.

The factory woman's life was doubly hard. She was undernourished, underpaid and often sexually harrassed. She worked throughout pregnancies, often to the day of giving birth.

For the ten years up to the turn of the century, women Marxists such as Alexandra Kollontai attempted to persuade the revolutionary movement to take more notice of women's needs. Most women were illiterate and it was the wealthier, educated ones who kept the movement going in public.

In 1904 the outbreak of war with Japan resulted in all peasant men being carted off to fight. The women, unable to support themselves and their families on the land, moved to the cities, where there was no work, and it was then that the revolution began. In 1908 it was crushed, and "women's rights" became a suspect topic. In 1913 socialist women organised demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg to celebrate the new International Women's Day on March 8th.

On Women's Day in 1917, strikes began, and women looted shops to feed their families. Kollontai and others planned a women's congress to discuss their rights, and launched the paper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker). Then the October Revolution came and the Bolsheviks made new laws covering marriage, divorce and abortion.

According to an article in *Soviet Weekly*, "The Bolshevik Revolution managed in a few short years to bring astounding changes to women's lives. For them October 1917 was the start of a new era, an end to humiliation and fear, and the birth of a new society in which men and women could live together as equals. War and revolution created the 'new Soviet woman', strong, brave and independent."\*

Stirring stuff! An interesting statement was made at the time of the Revolution by Alexandra Kollontai. Because they were too poor to do anything other than make women men's equals in law, it was women themselves who must fight for their full equality, by organising unions and Soviets in the factories, and deciding what laws they needed to protect them. Only then could a woman be both a mother and a

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\* *Soviet Weekly*, July 25, 1987

worker, without one job detracting from the other.

Whilst Kollontai was active in the USSR, women in the West were making their own protest, if less dramatically. The vote for women came in 1920 when the end of the First World War showed that many jobs previously performed only by men had been successfully taken over by women, who thus discovered new economic and domestic freedom. This threatened the male view of femininity and masculinity and the relationship between them. Several more acts passed in the 1920s increased women's rights in employment and childrearing.

A quiet time followed, but the 1960s saw the rebirth of the modern women's liberation or feminist movement. This was and is based politically on the fact that in 1970 women's wages were still only two thirds of men's, and the majority of women worked in mainly unskilled jobs.

In the last decade the position has improved slowly (the Act covering Equal Pay was passed in 1970, for Sex Equality in 1975), but still vast inequalities of work load exist. Perhaps more importantly, the core of the women's movement has increased its stress on the psychological aspect of inequality, actively emphasising the strengths in women's characters that have led them to accept the brunt of labour and existence under male domination throughout history.

This line of thought has led some women to an increasing belief that the female character is in some ways superior to the male's. A love of peace, for example, hence the women only peace camps that survived through intense negative media and political bombardment, of which more later. Needless to say, it is accepted by feminists that Mrs. Thatcher has suppressed her female attributes in order to succeed in a man's world.

But what is the modern situation of women's awareness in the Soviet Union? From what I have been able to gather, there are two aspects of women's rights. On the one hand women are better off in the USSR, and yet to some extent they are worse off.

In terms of employment there are now more women workers than men. They do a great deal of work in the service industries and form the vast majority of the lowly paid doctors and teachers. But the hours are long and the average Soviet city-dwelling woman battles to the shops in the lunch-hour and fights her way home on overcrowded

buses or trains. Then, in 90 per cent of households she is expected to do most of the housework. Add to this the fact that the USSR lags behind the West in terms of domestic appliances, and it is clear that the labour load falling on a woman does not get lighter.

The ironic reality is that though Russian women are fortunate compared to women in the West who still labour hard for smaller wages than men, they fall behind Western women in the proportion of domestic work they do, and the amount of effort this entails.

There are various reactions to this state of affairs, and varied results. The role of woman in Soviet society has traditionally been that of matriarch, running the family; it has always been very tough. The authorities realise this and they recognise a modern problem that results from the current situation of over-work—a decline in the birthrate.

The very thought that a woman should be considered in terms of her child production ratio is, I assume, abhorrent to the Western feminist. But the reality is that long working hours, limited space in apartments, and the strict controls on the time allowed off work to bring up children, all combine to ensure that more than half the couples in the Russian section of the USSR have only one child. Hence the population in these areas is declining.

Sex education is poor or non-existent, contraception irregular; consequently the abortion (and divorce) rate is the highest in the world.

Though no women's liberation movement, addressing women's problems in a modern way, is permitted, literary magazines and newspapers do carry letters and stories from time to time protesting at women's lot.

An account of how a woman with two children, unable to find a child-minder, looked after the child herself and virtually irrevocably her place in her career, will sound a familiar problem in the West where women make the choice between career and children, rarely managing to combine the two.

On the other hand, there is at least a respect for women. Again, respect of women by men is something the Western feminist does not advocate, because it is used by men as "We respect you so much we will not allow you to do this...."

In the USSR the respect means no pornography, no sexual abuse—and though that may sound idealistic, it is mainly true. There are, of course, no advertisements exploiting

women, no girlie calendars. To a Westerner this respect seems almost Victorian, and certainly a conservative sort of morality, which was shared by the women with whom I spoke. In Khabarovsk I met a group of female teachers and students who made a comment that both men and women have echoed when I asked what they thought of Mrs. Thatcher's appearance on Soviet TV.

"She looks very womanly," said student Larissa Sidorova. "She is a charming woman," repeated Natasha Bussel, another student, "It is her policy we are not happy with!"

This attitude is typical. I had earlier explained to my editor, Sergei, that to many British people Mrs. Thatcher's smooth voice rang hollow and artificial, that she simply used her womanliness to cover a hard, cruel character.

He told me in return that the much publicised live television interview Mrs. Thatcher held with journalists in Moscow, in which she won all the points, had indeed been watched by the Soviet public with great interest. But it was not so much what she said as the way she performed, her womanliness won them over.

Within days, letters to the newspapers complained how rude the journalists had been to her, no doubt in their eagerness to get answers, coupled with their inexperience in interviewing Western leaders in this way. Mrs. Thatcher is an exceptionally powerful human being, and according to her the advantages of traditional respect as a woman means declaring defeat.

Yet she is respected by many women (and men) in Britain for being a woman and for being so successful—having had two children on the way; whether or not they agree with her policies. On the other hand, some cannot believe she has made it so far and yet done so little for women.

And so it goes in the USSR where, though a woman is equal in all senses of the law, there is still a desire to keep a woman separate, a belief in "the woman's place", and the need for "womanliness" in dress and character. No more so was this expressed to me than by women themselves. Larissa again:

"I don't approve of what I know of feminism. To me a woman must BE a woman, there must be a difference. I think the family duties should be divided—but cooking, washing up, bringing up children is women's work. The

husband should help her with bringing up children, especially boys..."

Teacher Galina Misjura:

"It is too far away from the natural balance if men are equally participating. The women do the budgeting; women get the major part of the work."

Galina's friend and fellow teacher Nelly Serkova commented:

"Men have less work at home. The wife must know at one moment when to let her husband do this or that, so she can control him, let him feel a man. I want him to be a man still. For example the washing up—this is not manly. He does the gardening in the dacha."

The idea of women's quiet control is embodied in the saying "behind every great man there is a woman". But why should the women stand behind?

I asked about employment. Their image of womanliness seemed to fit in with the one of "the woman's place is in the home". I asked Nelly.

"No, we would never give up our work as women. It is additional contact, interesting, getting out. Work is not hard, but not always pleasant. We have equal pay."

"But do the men still take the higher ranks?"

"Yes, the higher ranks are men. I am very happy about that. Women lack leadership qualities. We leave it to them, let them do it, we are happy to raise children. The main thing is not to complain."

....Well, this Russian woman would certainly go down a bomb with Western male chauvinists. I asked after some girl construction site workers I'd seen in Moscow, "It's a bit unnatural—they choose to do it," was the response. In fact the Soviet government has been gradually taking away opportunities for women in heavy industry. In 1981 460 different occupations considered too physically demanding or unsuitable were banned for women.

But what does feminism mean in application? A friend in Glasgow considers her beliefs and attitudes to life feminist, though she adds:

"It is the image that the word feminism creates that is its worst enemy. Talk to women about their rights and hear them express strong views. Then ask them if they're feminists. They'll think you're enquiring as to whether they're lesbians or not, or asking if they hate men!"



My friend is called Pam Jones; she is now 25 years old, a teacher, and this is how she thinks of feminism:

"I have spoken to women in all walks of life and read a lot on feminism and often ask myself what the answers are (if any?).

"Is feminism a label for me, or a description of the freedom I have and aim to keep? The right to choose, as far as possible, my own identity, and not to have that freedom curtailed because I am a woman? I am independent, and hardly ever think of my gender as a barrier confining me to make certain choices. Perhaps my choices are never outside the boundaries of what society sees me to be capable of as a woman. I'm not sure. I have the confidence to do things—travel alone, train, understand, practical skills—which other women don't want. Part of this is definitely confidence, concerning fear of what others think and how far you stray outside the defined role provided by society. I don't always have the confidence, but I feel women should be feminists in so far as their consciousness has been raised; they realise they have choices also.

"Many of the things I now take for granted are among the things that women find it hard to choose. I realise this when I meet older women who have been married, had children and are now studying at college or choosing to live with another woman. These are the women who are so much more aware than I of the freedom they have gained.

"What I'm trying to say is that I carry on my life not really making my gender an issue as I benefit from other women's efforts and battles. I admit that I haven't tried to break into top bank finance or oil drilling—which I doubt I'd have much interest in. But the important thing is to have a choice, and feminism for me is making men and women aware that there is a need for that choice. A choice to have a child or not, to not be exploited for doing the same day's work as a man.

"Just because someone becomes aware it does not mean they will act any differently. They just realise the choice exists."

"...So what about women in the USSR? Do they have the choice?"

"In some ways women in the Soviet Union have achieved what feminism has not—equal pay, work and rights. Perhaps 'feminism' is a Western phenomenon. It materialised out of

the freedom of the 60s, people looking at what they had and realising they wanted more personal freedoms, liberation.

"Surely in the USSR everyone works. Have women a chance to do anything other than what society expects of them? A set of defined roles once again, but fewer choices. The Soviet woman does not have equality, she has equal pay and rights, but still a woman's work—the catering, waiting on people is still not shared.

"The quote you mention from Larissa Sidorova, 'To me a woman must be a woman, there must be a difference,' is an opinion which is lacking in understanding or misguided by information she has read."

*(Author's note: This is quite correct. Larissa had in fact never heard of feminism as such and I attempted to give her a potted picture, but no doubt got confused over the usual stumbling block of the depth of equality women seek, and so on.)*

"The media's picture of the essential attributes of a woman—being giving, self-sacrificing to others but first and foremost to her family. She represses her own aspirations (if she has any) to work for the husband/man in her life."

That is the basis of the case, then. As to how far feminist ideals should be implemented in society, if the option actually existed, women's opinions vary. At least they vary in terms of campaigning from, as Pam puts it, the enlightened attitude. They're all a bunch of fucking lesbians and it's a load of shit to that which most frightens the men who run our present society. Again Pam describes these women's ideals—they are termed "extremists" by those who like labels.

"Perhaps they would not replace a man's world with a woman's, but would instead alter the emphasis so that what are seen as 'weak feminine' or caring values could be brought to the fore and no longer regarded as weak, but important."

One way in which this change of emphasis has come to the fore since 1981 is the arrival of "women only" peace camps, particularly at Britain's nuclear bases. The women there have survived torrents of media abuse, public abuse, violence and government attempts to move them away—all totally without violence on their own part. In fact the whole point of the camp is to demonstrate that it is man who wages war, man who makes war. War is totally masculine, peace is feminine.

The book about Greenham Common Nuclear Missile Base, by the women who started the camp there, states: "Over

the months Cruise has become a symbol of nuclear terror, male domination and imperialist exploitation.”\*

At a recent peace rally, Austrian Green Party member Freda Meissnerblav confirmed, “Feminism and anti-militarism cannot be separated.”

This attitude and belief, though perhaps not so fully developed, is far from denied in the USSR. The book *War's Unwomanly Face*,\*\* by Svetlana Alexievich, won universal acclaim, telling the tale of women snipers, pilots, gunners, guerillas and resistance fighters.

“It could only occur to a woman to tie a bunch of violets to a bayonet when a lull set in. It could only be a woman that inscribed on the wall of the Reichstag after the fall of Nazi Germany, ‘I have come to Berlin to kill war.’ She was Sophia Kuntsevich.” Svetlana Alexievich wrote her book to show that women and war are incompatible.

The stand by the women at Greenham Common was in keeping with the Russian ideals of womanhood just quoted, and in some ways closer than the Soviet Union has managed to come to communism, even if this was not their primary aim.

“From the very beginning of the camp the principle of working without hierarchies was established. Most of our experience in this divided world shows us that certain people are in charge and the rest are meant to follow. This is how nuclear weapons have been able to pile up virtually unhindered for 40 years....

So we are starting from scratch, developing attitudes and methods that make domination and opting out unnecessary. We try to give every woman a voice—as in meetings where every woman speaks in turn around the circle—and this makes us listen to each other. We are teaching each other in an intense way. And this means that women who have been identified by the press as spokeswomen have no more impact on decision-making than women who may have arrived the day before. It is new to us, we fail often, but it must be done, for political change is deeper and more firm when there is personal change too....

From our alternative reality, the world from which we come looks pale and comfortless. We have to transform it.

\* *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*, Ed. by Barbara Harford, Sarah Hopkins, The Women's Press, London, 1984, p. 1

\*\* The book was put out by Progress Publishers in 1988.—Ed.

Not by reforms, but by revolution. The tide is turning because women are making sure it does.”\*

Whether the Greenham women’s communal style of living was the main reason for the onslaught they received from the press is debatable. More likely it was simply that they challenged so many established social conventions. The papers’ attack was largely constructed along the same lines as anti-Soviet attacks, minimal or manipulated facts, and maximum slander and abuse. Homosexuality was the main “insult”—sadly, even with apparently advanced political thinking, the USSR is still as primitive and hypocritical as Britain, with its law that homosexuality is illegal. But the world over, the abuse is the same.

Perhaps Greenham’s women demonstrated an extreme of feminist as well as anti-nuclear feeling. Yet perhaps many people believe in the same things but are not brave enough to stand up and take action.

Women’s consciousness at this level means that ideological boundaries into Eastern Europe are artificial, that nations are man-made—the emphasis being on male—and that the global sisterhood that is only restrained by man-made laws could bring true global understanding and peace.

“Greenham has changed the lives of the women. Traditionally men have left home for the front-line of war. Now women are leaving home to work for peace. Peace isn’t just about removing a few pieces of war furniture, or bringing about an international cease-fire; it is about the condition of our lives. Peace is the absence of greed and the domination of a few over the rest of us. So the fight is bigger and longer than we thought! And women have a great deal to gain by it (and for generations we have missed out on the love of other women) the chance to choose for ourselves, free of men’s expectations and demands, beyond the isolation of the nuclear family. That’s why Greenham is a woman’s place.”\*\*

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\* *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*, op. cit., pp. 3, 5

\*\* *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*, op. cit., pp. 3-4

Travelling around I met a lot of people with an enthusiasm for Westernised pop, and even more with an enthusiasm for Soviet pop. Then again the average Soviets' history of pop seems to begin with The Beatles and then spends 80 per cent of its time with Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Rainbow et al. The Sex Pistols don't feature in the memory banks. Abba are a popular, their final disks which never made the UK charts are among the favourites. Boney M played Moscow in the mid-70s and scandalised the establishment by playing the much chanted for "Rasputin", having been specifically asked not to by the powers that be. Elton John is also popular and an enthusiastic Leningrad hotel porter informed me that I was staying in the same hotel bedroom as Mr. John did when he visited. I wondered if the bath plug fitted in his day.

Apart from heavy metal though, the average Soviets' knowledge is sketchy. I met a DJ in Siberia who operated the local Sputnik (young people's) Radio Station and a disco in the city. He informed me categorically that the inspiration behind the Beatles song "Back in the USSR" was an unpublicised trip the band made to play a gig in the Kremlin for the Soviet elite, a friend then informed me that his favourite Beatles track was "We are the Champions."

"Are Boy George and Bob Dylan still going?" was another question, there seemed to be some assumption that they played in the same band. I played them my Sigue Sigue Sputnik tape in the disco one night and all questions ceased.

Radios now blatantly belt out the worst of Western pop drivel from France and Spain, "Agadoo", "Hold a Chicken In The Air...", "Have a Happy, Twatty Holiday", that sort of thing. Nobody understands the lyrics of course, many who learnt English after first hearing the Beatles talk of the

joy they experienced when they understood the "simple but beautiful" lyrics.

Pink Floyd are not so easily understood, but they have their fans, who label the likes of Wham, A-Ha and Madonna as "tufta" or to translate, "garbage".

Glasnost for pop means that many of the more acceptable underground bands are finally being dug up by the state music company, Melodia, and suddenly find themselves playing huge concerts, touring the country, making movies and being pestered by journalists and TV chat show hosts.

Some of them enjoy it, but others such as Boris Grebenshchikov, lead singer of rock/blues band Aquarium, claims he was a lot happier playing sweaty "Cavern Club" type gigs on Fridays and spending the week sitting around philosophising and reading poetry. He commented that prior to glasnost, Russia had been a Godsend for pop stars, simply because, "You need oppression to sing the blues."

One popular Western misconception is that most young Soviets spend their time craving for Western pop and memorabilia. True, cassettes and flashy T-shirts are much more valuable than dollars on the black market, but it's also true that Russians are quite happy with their own top bands and rather disappointed to discover Westerners have never heard of them.

On my last morning in Moscow I met Andrei Makarevich, lead singer of number one Soviet band in terms of measurable success, Time Machine. He looked not unlike a miniature version of Roger Daltrey and named his influences as Pink Floyd and The Beatles though he's currently particularly fond of Mark Knopfler. The authors of the book *USSR, from an Original Idea by Karl Marx* note that Time Machine are comparable to Smokey. Be that as it may, their single "She Walks Smiling Around The World" was at number one for a year. Andrei's two movies have been seen by 140 million people.

I'd read Western reports that Soviet pop stars moaned about suppression and underpayment. They were certainly on the poverty line compared to established and successful Soviet writers who enjoy several houses, cleaners, and chauffeur driven limousines. Andrei told me that as the band's sole song writer, composing 50 per cent of their music and having been professional for about eight years, he now earned about 5,000 roubles a month (about £5,000). He was more

than happy with his lot and was pleased with the way pop music was being finally allowed to develop. "It's allowed not because the government like it, but because they can no longer suppress it."

The first rock music albums were released in 1986. Now you can buy Dire Straits, Whitney Houston, and, amazingly, Abba and The Beatles.

Andrei reckons that Soviet rock is musically equal or superior to Western. He expressed surprise that after having grown to love the songs of Floyd's "The Dark Side of The Moon", John Lennon, Billy Joel—when finally he learnt English sometime later, he discovered they were all writing about the same things as him.

Technically though he acknowledged the Soviets lagged a long way behind. He has purchased his own eight-track recording studio but wants a 24-track. He can't buy a new PA system to replace the band's now inadequate and in any case knackered five-year-old one, because he can't get the hard currency.

What about "The Power of Pop"—how did he feel about the more positive aspects like "Live Aid". "It's fantastic, of course." I remembered seeing a brief glimpse of a Soviet band on the televised show; (much to the consternation of *The Sun* et al who had delighted in telling everyone that though "Live Aid" was being beamed round the world for the good of all, the "commies" weren't taking part). The band had looked like a flash back to early 70s TOTP. These were apparently Autograf one of the biggies. "Why hadn't Time Machine taken part?" "Nobody told us about it until two weeks after it had happened."

Inspired by the visits of bands like UB40 (whose tickets reached black market prices which could only be matched here by a Beatles reformation), Time Machine hope to get exposure in the West early next year. They've already toured Greece and are soon to go to Japan, and then enter an international pop-festival in the Netherlands. But whether Smokey in Russian will ever be TOTP here remains to be seen. "I've tried translating the lyrics to English," Andrei explained, "But it just doesn't seem to work yet. Still, I'll keep trying."

## UNDERSTANDING HOW WE UNDERSTAND THESE IDEOLOGIES

*Like it or not our societies and often our personalities can be characterised into an ideology. But there is some confusion on each side how these ideological terms should be applied.*

### Capitalism

The Oxford English Dictionary\* says: "...system in which private capital or wealth is used in production and distribution of goods; (politically) dominance of private owners of capital and production for profit."

In the USSR most people visiting from North America or Western Europe regard anti-capitalist posters (generously translated into English, unlike the metro signs!) as a personal attack on themselves as individuals, since they are residents of a country with a predominantly capitalist society. Leading members of minority groups from the West, who advocate communism or revolutionary socialism might feel differently, but for the majority this is the case.

Another problem in comprehension for Western visitors is how, in an "everyone is equal" society, they manage to have

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\* Quotes from *The Oxford Concise English Dictionary*, Oxford University, 1977, by kind permission of the publishers. — *Auth.*



virtual millionaires and special shops where only the wealthy and successful may shop, using special vouchers. In the West there may be huge differences of income, but there are no shops that refuse to sell to people—so long as they have the cash or credit to pay. (There are probably a few that don't, but that must be as a gimmick, not government policy.)

The other comprehension problem is how the USSR has suddenly started having workers co-operatives running smaller businesses in competition with the huge state organisations.

The basic answer seems to be that capitalism—to Soviet minds—means the exploitation of one human being by another. Hence to run a business and take an unfair share of the profits (i.e. you lie on a beach all year and take £500,000, you pay your employees who actually do the work £5,000 a year) means you are exploiting their labour and you are a capitalist.

On the other hand, being one of the workers, you are a "worker" who is exploited by the capitalist.

It is possible for people to become very rich in the Soviet Union. Firstly if, through their efforts, they help the state to be more successful, the state rewards them financially. It is interesting that writers and artists can also make huge amounts of money and win perks (chauffeur, foreign travel, etc.) in some circumstances, because when people buy their books they exercise their own choice, and no exploitation is involved.

Therefore, in terms of the UK's richest man, it is safe to assume that the Duke of Westminster is a capitalist, having exploited his fellow men by charging them huge rents to live in inherited property. It is arguable that he mainly exploits wealthy capitalists, but then they must be exploiting someone else.

On the other hand, ex-Beatle Paul McCartney, now one of Britain's top ten wealthiest men, is really not much of a capitalist. He has made his money because people all over the world (including the Soviet Union) love his music and buy his records. Having said that, I believe he has now bought the old record company he came to fame on, in a bid to maximise his profits, rather than be ripped off by the capitalists. Unfortunately by doing that he puts himself in a dangerously capitalist position.

However, bearing in mind his excellent record in charity work, I vote we let him off!

Bob Geldof is simply a moral hero, under all ideologies.

I am unsure what the situation is regarding the directors of public companies, who are paid vast sums for their positions of responsibility. They certainly have emanated from capitalist-type institutions and made their way up in a cut-throat, capitalist way. However, their salaries are largely due to the success of the companies they manage. It just seems that £1,000,000 a year for, say, Sir Ralph Halpern, managing the Burton Group, is a little out of proportion compared to the £1,500 one of his YTS trainees receives in his shops. So he's probably a capitalist.

He doesn't get to go in any special shops as he would in the USSR of course, but these shops and the vouchers for them appear to be awards in the form of consumer products (skis, VCRs, etc.) for those who successfully serve the state.

The workers co-operatives are not at all capitalist, though very successful, in the USSR. Basically, these give groups of people the opportunity to run businesses themselves—such as bakeries, shops, restaurants and now virtually anything. They work out their own structures and wages can be increased if a business is thriving. However, there is no exploitation as bosses and workers receive similar wages.

This is "competitive socialism" and it appears to be desperately needed in most areas (see "Full Employment versus Unemployment"), where workers suffer from a lack of incentive, and corruption; apathy and so on develop.

It can also be viewed as a concession to the capitalist system and a move away from communist ideals, if not towards actual capitalism.

### **Consumerism**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "... a consumer is the user of an article, as opposed to the producer; the purchaser of goods or services, ... consumerism is the protection of such purchasers' interests."

The popular view involves the purchase of non-essential items for one's own pleasure. According to Novosti this means fashionable clothes, frequent changes of privately owned cars, large houses, VCRs, etc. According to your

average Soviet citizens—who would of course appreciate better housing, and would quite like one car—it means always buying clothes if they go abroad. The difference is stated by many that they don't need such things as persian rugs, Parisienne designer clothes or Rolls Royces.

There is tremendous dissatisfaction with the quality of goods in Soviet shops. Ask a Soviet what he brought back from a foreign holiday and the reply will always be something like "a suit", "pop records", "a carpet" or "a cassette recorder".

Supplies of goods in shops are erratic, and as one friend put it, "We go to the shops and we don't know what we'll come home with. We buy whatever is available. Sometimes there may be training shoes, so we buy three pairs, and some for our friends, because they may not be in the shops again for two or three years. You cannot say, 'I will come back tomorrow,' because by then they may have gone."

There is a clear distinction however, which is more distinct than consumerism from which a great many Soviets do suffer and probably more would if they had the opportunity (thus the existence of the second economy—the flourishing black market).

The real difference is that in the West money is the absolute god, whether we own it or owe it, money rules our lives completely. In the USSR the love of money is not so noticeable and it cannot buy you power so easily. You cannot, for example, own and publish a newspaper. It is more important to be a good Soviet and to work hard in a society that offers at least some types of equality, if you want to succeed.

### **Consumption and Superconsumption**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "... using up; destruction; waste; purchase and use of goods, etc."

This is similar to consumerism, except that it is a measure of it. Soviets correctly point out that the West refers to average consumption as they do to average income and the standard of living which invariably contain both the small percentage of the population that can afford to buy the

most, and the very poor part who can afford to buy very little.

It is the rich who achieve superconsumption of ocean-going yachts, luxury mansions and so on. The rest of us just manage consumption.

### **Bourgeois**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "... person of humdrum or middle-class ideas; selfish(ly) materialist; capitalist(ic).

Rather old-fashioned term in the West but still used in the Soviet Union, and perhaps it is a better term than capitalist as the majority of Westerners do not mistakenly identify themselves with it. It also reinforces the image perpetuated by Novosti publications that the USSR is stuck in a time warp around the 1920s and that people's minds (as defined by Novosti) have been locked into some strange unreal and idealistic image of human nature.

However, the bourgeois were and are mainly the wealthy land owners, or ruling classes who don't need to do any work—capitalist exploitation or otherwise—to remain extremely wealthy (though they usually do).

It is they, together with the capitalists and imperialists (often one person can attain all three titles and more) who exploit the masses, whilst satisfying them with consumer products, tying them with credit payments, and filling their brains with soap operas, pornography, romantic fiction and comics, e.g. *The Sun*—thus preventing the danger of intelligent and constructive thought.

### **Petty-Bourgeois**

Most closely ascribed in Britain to the new term *Yuppie* based on "Young Upwardly Mobile Professionals". These are the people who aspire to be bourgeois, or who hold bourgeois ideology and some status but at the same time have some social conscience (i.e. Tolstoy).

### **Imperialism**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "... extension of British Empire where trade required protection

given by Imperial rule; ... union ... for purposes of warlike defence, internal commerce etc., ... acquiring colonies and dependencies."

This is probably the most frequently used anti-Western term, again generously translated into English all over the USSR (unlike the street signs) as the Soviets claim that all military and political interventions in other countries by capitalist nations are for reasons of exploitation; whilst military and political intervention by the USSR is in accordance with their policy of friendship, good-neighbourliness, co-operation and not exploitation.

In spite of the Oxford Dictionary, "imperialism" as a derogatory term is now chiefly aimed at the Americans. Britain's exploitation of most of the world is more or less forgotten (especially by we British who still labour under the delusion that we were there primarily to educate and bring Christianity).

However, the Americans are forever supporting either capitalist governments or capitalist rebels in unbalanced little countries of South America, Africa and Southern Asia, whilst the USSR is forever supporting socialist governments and socialist rebel groups. According to the Soviets they do so merely to prevent the Americans forcibly creating more satellite states whose resources they can then exploit (as well as making profits from the actual war), whilst the Soviets only wish to educate the people and offer whatever brotherly socialist assistance is required. This is why there is an enormous Soviet presence in Ethiopia whilst "Live Aid" attempts to feed all the people starving to death there. Guns and bombs that kill people are invariably "Russian-made" or "American-made". Then again if schools and hospitals were built by the Russians we'd never get to hear about that in Britain.

On a visit to the USSR you will see numerous anti-imperialist, pro-peace murals, posters and logos. As with capitalism it is a mistake to assume that coming from a capitalist/imperialist nation automatically means you are one. Soviets differentiate between those political leaders and their armies that implement imperialist policy, and those people that vote for them. The government and the armies are the imperialists, not the people.

I wrote on a peace wall in Khabarovsk, "Some impe-

rialists want peace too!" and instantly blew the logic circuits of the Soviets in the room!

## Communism

The Oxford Dictionary says: "System of society with vesting of property in the community, each member working for the common benefit according to his capacity and receiving according to his needs; ... movement or political party advocating communism especially as derived from Marxism, communistic form of society established in 20th c. in USSR and elsewhere."

Communism is very much an ideal which as yet has only really worked when practised by relatively small groups as The Women's Peace Camp, Israeli Kibbutzem and independent communes. A Russian told me that in terms of philosophy the Soviets have a global ideal of communism—which no doubt explains why the capitalists are so unwilling to allow their case to be heard, and vice versa. The phrase that describes this concept is, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his requirements."

In other words everyone works as hard as he can, or as hard as is needed to achieve "enough", and this is then distributed among everyone according to what every individual needs.

Global communism would mean an end to unpleasant things like governments, politics, money, armaments, wars and so on, though one assumes there would have to be some sort of world government running it all.

Soviet people do apparently believe that such a state of affairs could come about, and will do, and even Novosti speaks of "... such a time as the conditions for the communist mode of distribution according to need come into existence."\* It seems a similar sort of ideal to Jesus's second coming. Let's hope someone has it right.

There are cynics (including myself) who suggest that, human nature being what it is—selfish, greedy and not universally friendly (and no less so in the USSR)—communism on a global scale, or even in a larger group of several

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\* *USSR. 100 Questions and Answers*, op. cit., p. 79

hundred people is a human impossibility. Others argue that a policy of the Soviet Union is to change the very nature of man. They quote the then Party Central Committee Secretary, Konstantin Chernenko, who told a Party Plenum in June 1983: "The revolutionary transformation of society is impossible without changing man himself. And our Party proceeds from the premise that the moulding of the new man is not only the most important aim but also an imperative condition of communist construction."

Which clearly seems to endorse the need to change mankind itself, except that it is as dangerously easy to translate meanings inaccurately, as to mistake words. Example: when Khrushchev said, "We will bury you" he did not mean, as it was interpreted, that the Soviets were going to nuke America, but that in the future the world would be a communist one, and that capitalism would become a memory like feudalism and previous empires.

As to changing the individual psyche and mankind as a race, many different views are held as to whether this is morally correct or indeed possible.

Western critics denounce such a policy as brain-washing and claim that the Soviet population is spurred on to greater efficiency and harder work by the wall slogans and what seem rather naive rewards such as having a black-and-white photo of yourself stuck up somewhere in town if you are a particularly good worker, similar to being made milk monitor at school. Other critics claim that the denouncement of religion in favour of Lenin/Party worship instilled from birth is again a bid to make citizens concentrate on their own society by denying the existence of something better in the next world.

Whatever your view on this, counter-critics can claim that the USSR has at least got it partially right in that encouraging efficiency and labour for the state does lead to improvements for all instead of just a new swimming pool for the capitalist directors and that it is very sad to see peasants in many third world and Southern European countries wasting all the wealth they do accumulate on wayside religious shrines and hideously wealthy churches, whilst they live a life of poverty, hoping for an after life (which, according to atheists, does not exist.)

The point on which opposition is united, and on which all the solid argument is based, is whether people **SHOULD**

be re-educated, especially bearing in mind that it would be human beings—equally fallible—who would be responsible for the re-education along the lines of a philosophy worked out by another fallible human being.

Be that as it may, there are many free-thinking Westerners whose philosophies are linked very closely with communism. Our second ex-Beatle of the section, John Lennon, worded his famous song "Imagine" along basic communist ideals: "Imagine there's no countries, ... no hell below us, ... nothing to kill or die for, ... no possessions, ... no religion ..."

A more recent socially-aware pop-star, Howard Jones, who lists John Lennon as his major hero, wrote a little-known song earlier in his career which runs: "Don't talk to me about ban the bomb, don't ask me which side I'm on. Replace the system with one just the same? Don't you realise we're all the same? Change the man! Rip out the roots, let's get rid of this insanity." It goes on: "Can't change the system by smashing it down, inside route to revolution."

I'm not suggesting that either John Lennon or Howard Jones would advocate the Soviet route to communism, indeed each has sported haircuts that would constitute an arrestable offence in the USSR, only that ideals around the world remain very similar.

Back on the semantic side of life, it is worth noting that referring to the Soviets as communists or "commies" is incorrect; they are a socialist nation, aiming for communism. I would also hazard a guess that very few people in the West have the faintest idea what communism really is.

### **Socialism**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "Political and economic theory of social organisation which advocates that community as a whole should own and control the means of production, distribution, and exchange; policy or practice based on this theory."

The Russian man I met on a park bench in Moscow said: "We define socialism as 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his labour.'"

The Soviet Union is a socialist society and its organisation both internally and externally is based upon improving social-



ist policy, whilst moving in the direction of communism. Unfortunately there do seem to be a few inconsistencies with the move towards communism. For example, the two ways in which society in the USSR benefits from its labour.

Novosti points out that these are first according to the quantity and quality of work by the individual, and second by social consumption funds. The latter are spent on universal health and education, pensions, grants and general welfare of the people. The distribution of wealth according to quantity and quality of work is inconsistent with the communist ideal. Ironically then it is the special shops, nice apartments and chauffeur-driven cars of the people who are supposed to be shaping the country ready for communism, that will have to go when communism arrives. One can only hope that these people—charged with destroying their own well-being for the sake of the masses—are extremely virtuous human beings. At least Mr. Gorbachev seems to be weeding out those who are not, but who have been allowed to flourish in previous administrations.

Few honest people could deny that socialism as a concept is a far more morally worthwhile ideology than capitalism. Under the Christian ethic capitalism seems to be against the teachings of Jesus.

But we are getting lost in hypothesis. Although, as I say, honest men must see the virtues of socialism as a concept, this does not mean that people must agree with the Soviet method of implementing it. Possibly, they prefer to be exploited workers under a capitalist system, however imperfect it may be, than non-exploited socialists in the USSR. It all depends on your outlook, and it would be useful if more nations respected this in their own people and those of other countries, and tried to be friendly towards them, rather than exerting influence.

There are many phrases involving the word "socialism". "Social reconstruction" generally refers to the building of a whole society under a socialist system—usually the USSR. "Socialist realism" is the much debated policy under which writers and artists work. Questions asked by Westerners, referred to by Novosti include: "Why are there no masters equal to Pushkin, Tolstoy and Chekhov among Soviet writers?", "Are works by Hemingway (or Faulkner, or Sagan, etc.) more interesting than many of the books by modern Soviet authors?", "Are many works by Soviet

artists dull, declaratory and psychologically unconvincing?"

Basically, "socialist realism" involves being very positive about Soviet-style socialism and ignoring everything else. Novosti's answers to the above questions are that some of the present authors will probably be considered great in the future, and that it is the fault of the writers and artists rather than the system that everything is very dull. The Union of Writers disagreed with this statement at its recent congress, claiming that petty restrictions hampered publication of new, more exciting authors; and in recent years more critical books, films, records and so on have appeared, highlighting problems within society, rather than just ignoring them. It is true that some long-shelved works are still regarded as anti-Soviet by hardliners. For the more realistic, the artists are able to fulfil an important role of criticism and warning of possible failures, not because they are anti-Soviet, but because they, as much if not more than most people, want to ensure that everything really is moving in the correct direction, according to Lenin's philosophy.

### **Proletariat**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "The lowest class of the community... That class of the community which is dependent on daily labour for subsistence, and has no reserve or capital; the indigent wage-earners...."

The proletariat is again a rather old-fashioned term from the earlier days of this century. It refers to the great mass of the population in any country which does the actual work. In the earlier days of this century, when there was a clearer distinction between the working classes, the business class and the landowning class, then the workers were the "proletariat".

It is these people that revolutions are made of, though an awful lot of stirring-up has to be arranged by the "intelligentsia". George Orwell and Charles Dickens both despaired of the proletariat when it came to persuading them to rebel against the virtual slavery in which they existed. It took starvation and considerable propaganda to create the action needed to bring about the revolutions in France and Russia.

## **Intelligentsia**

The Oxford Dictionary says: "Class of intellectuals regarded as possessing culture and political initiative; class of persons doing intellectual work".

Whilst the classes in a capitalist society depend chiefly on the relative wealth of people, the Soviets have traditionally had the wealthy, the workers and the intelligentsia. Though the intelligentsia was largely formed from the more wealthy classes. In terms of the years leading up to the 1917 revolution, they organised and influenced the peasants, living under terrible conditions, to rebel. Now that the Soviet Union is a virtual classless society the intelligentsia remains, and remains powerful. To imagine that Dr. Sakharov and other dissidents represent the intelligentsia viewpoint would, however, be wildly inaccurate. The intelligentsia does contain many underground writers and artists, but also official ones, increasingly so as the less subversive underground work is now acceptable. Basically they are the same as our intellectuals except that they exist as a more definable and active group within society. They are not often subversive, however, and then only in part.

## **TRADITIONALISM**

Conservative thinking employed by someone who got along very nicely 30 years ago when society suited them, rose to power at that time and now attempts to hold on to that power by trying to keep their little bit of the world from progressing. Common in the church, imperialist ideology, and in the Soviet Union, hence the joke on planes arriving in the Soviet Union. The hostess supposedly announces, "We are now arriving in Moscow, please turn your watch back fifty years." Glasnost and perestroika hope to displace the powerful traditionalists but it is a tough battle.

I suppose that after so much talk it is up to someone to draw some conclusions, and I suppose that, as the author of this book, that someone should be me. On the other hand, you will have drawn your own conclusions, and I am loathe to draw any of my own. As I try to explain in the section on truth, it is very difficult to define what is true; so many of our facts are distorted and our perspectives for looking at these distortions differ. I know therefore that some of my conclusions are based on dubious facts.

I have also just received a letter from Jenny Sutton. She writes: "One thing that I feel is very important and that most of the books I've read on the Soviet Union don't take into account. That is, that many writers 'study' the Soviet Union in almost complete isolation, as if it were an entity quite independent of the surrounding world. This kind of approach can only be false, and will help only those who would gladly see an end to the Soviet system. "I can understand your inclination to criticize; we (in the Soviet Union) do it better and far more thoroughly than anyone else. We do this passionately because we love the country; such criticism must be constructive and the only criticism that will be new in the West will be of this constructive kind."

Jenny hasn't seen the manuscript, of course, but perhaps she is summing up what I have tried to do to the best of to my conditioned, westernised ability.

But conclusions... I will number and sub-title these.

## SYSTEMS

Political systems are, on one level, subject to the human beings that operate them. Therefore, however ideal a system, it is the human components that interpret its application. Quote Lenin:

"We have to build socialism with the people who are available, and some of the people are not angels".

How true. People are individually selfish, and when selfish people are given power they are quite prepared to bend the system. It is a unifying factor of religion, business and politics, in the East and in the West. Currently no one has found a way round it. If they ever did, a new problem would arise, and man would strive to beat that. Such "progress" motivates the human soul.

Which system you belong to very much depends on where you're born, how you're brought up and very little else. It is difficult to blame Mrs. Thatcher or the US President for being what they are—merely products, interpretations of the past; they imagine that they are acting for the best and are surrounded by people who assure them that this is the case. Until the arrival of Gorbachev the Kremlin operated in much the same way, and may fall back to doing so again.

To quote my friend Terry Christian a radio presenter, "The Soviets still have a ruling class, but that depends on toeing the line and not being too opinionated—a dissident—just as it does in the West. The staunchest Communist Party member in the Soviet Union, if he were American or British, would be the staunchest advocate of capitalism, if he had been brought up in the West, and vice versa. Some people are naturally rebellious and others will always believe whatever values authority lays down for them. People everywhere are stupid in a way".

Everyone is aware of this fact of course, and yet it seems to be forgotten when we deal with conclusion two.

### *MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING*

There isn't much, is there? Everyone seems to ignore the obvious fact that we are all human and, instead, labour under a delusion that the Soviets are more evil or more lazy than us, and the Soviets imagine that the Westerners are all inciting a war. These views are all reinforced by each system in a bid to help its members to forget about all their own problems. Visiting the USSR, I was at least sure that most of the accusations made in the West were farcical. After fifty years of almost non-stop wars and civil wars, until the end of the Great Patriotic War, with more than

the equivalent of every man, woman and child in Britain dying in the process, the last thing the Soviets want is another war. Nor do the people of the West.

It's just that, with Britain at least having experienced only a fraction of the suffering, many people don't remember, don't think about it. We don't think about a lot of things. The people are all pro-peace in their own way, it's the leaders I worry about. The Soviets would say I am wrong to worry about their side, the Kremlin, but I cannot shake off a lifetime of conditioning, coupled with a continuing fear of something mysterious that seems detached from Soviet democracy further down the scale. Britain and the USA, well, our governments worry me a great deal more. No one has any cause to start a war. Even assuming it was a war anyone could win, then the winning side would be in the unenviable position of having to prove their system works on a global scale without having anyone else to abuse to take people's minds off their continuing problems. They would also have on their conscience the obliteration of millions or billions of innocent people. Like all common people, the logic behind global war, even without the nuclear question, escapes me. With the nuclear dimension, the futility takes on a whole new level and again—why if both sides want disarmament they can't be rid of all the bombs in one stroke, also mystifies me.

The Soviet system continues to move forward. Though it is not attractive enough in its application to gain many Western converts, most of whom are quite happy with their life-styles, even if they do not support many of their government's policies.

To quote my friend Neil Davies, who travels around the world supervising the installation of computers. "In general, people are all the same; they will normally help you when they realise you are a foreigner. People in general have the same problems: working, earning money, eating, boredom—although I must stress I have never visited African countries such as Biafra and Ethiopia, where coping with starvation must be the over-riding problem.

"From an idealistic point of view, a society that helps the people who are ill and infirm, who provides equality in education, employment and so on, such as the Soviet Union, must be morally superior. However, too many factors are ignored to be taken seriously. Helping the

worst off should not mean restricting individual rights. So, although Soviet ideology might be morally better, it doesn't mean that I would rather live under it in the REAL world, only in an IDEAL world—that is one without people."

I have no doubt that a Soviet citizen could come up with a similar comment on Western capitalism. Yet, however hard the governments of each side try to do the other down, they have to borrow each other's ideas on the sly to solve problems, and so the systems move closer together, as the world moves industrially and economically forward. In the West we have "popular capitalism", in the USSR "competitive socialism".

How do the Soviets see the Western world? I'm still not sure. Terry Christian made an interesting comment:

"The Soviets probably see us as an archaic, class-ridden society, where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; little more than a satellite of the USA. They are probably right.

"They are probably suspicious of the West as a whole because our economic system depends on constant expansion and exploitation of the third world. They are probably worried that the West wants to expand its business interests into the Soviet Union: no rest until there's a McDonalds Hamburger joint in Red Square".

I liked that, especially because I actually wrote to McDonalds in Canada to ask if they had any plans to expand into the Soviet Union, but before I got a reply, and three months after Terry's remarks, *Soviet Weekly* announced the building of two McDonalds in Moscow by 1992. McDonalds are conquering the world.

It is true that, the more you travel, assuming you have a reasonably open mind (which obviously many political leaders don't have), then the more you can develop a balanced view. Unfortunately this balanced view leaves many vital questions unanswered. There are too many factors, too much dubious evidence for the human brain to consider. There is an exceptionally good book in which it is claimed that the earth is merely a computer programmed by a race of very intelligent aliens who wish to know the answer to life, the Universe and everything. We mere mortals don't really require an answer to such a big question. There are a lot of much smaller ones to be cleared up first.

PART FIVE.  
**CONCLUSIONS**



## IMPRESSIONS OF THE USSR

*"Before too long (theoretically), the Soviet Union will be a truly efficient, egalitarian, Communist society. For the time being, it is bewilderingly chaotic—a hybrid life-form requiring special survival skills and immense patience."*

*USSR. From an Original Idea by  
Karl Marx, London, 1986*

*"From where money is god to where Lenin is  
Jesus Christ".*

*From the Sleeve Notes to the Video  
Recording of the Popband UB40'S  
1987 Trip to the USSR.*

It is very easy to be critical about the Soviet Union. Let's face it, few people are anything other than that. But this book is supposed to be about impressions, and as everyone else has had a say, I'd like to add a little more about my trip round Russia, and especially what I liked about it and what I learned. A newspaper editor in Britain recently asked, "How much do our Western assumptions of the Soviet Union stop us from finding anything there that does not fit them?"

It is of course ironic that he asks this, as it is his paper and others like it that create the majority of these "assumptions" in our minds, but still the question is very valid. It can be applied East to West as well as West to East, or from anywhere to anywhere really.

The truth is that huge and powerful forces in America and the USSR keep images alive. Many people in both countries would lose prestige and influence if the two superpowers stopped believing that the other was evil—the

belief which is, after all, the real human insanity behind what people call "nuclear insanity". The insanity lies with national propaganda policy, not the weapons in themselves, they are harmless without the minds of those able to use them.

But as usual my nuclear paranoia is obscuring the memory of my happy holidays.

So what were the things I liked? Well, I liked the tea! I am something of a disappointment in England because of my failure to leap at the regular offers of tea and coffee, always served with milk and sugar. I have stoically failed to become an addict. But the green tea is something totally different, clean, refreshing. Not in stupid little bags either. That was something else—there may be food shortages in Russia, and being raised on fast food there were certainly times when I missed hamburgers, Marks and Spencer sandwiches, Gunster's ploughman's pastries—but I did appreciate the realness of the food. No additives, preservatives or colourings. Just food. It was good. Yet I could not keep up with the huge meals platefuls consumed by the average Soviet three or four times a day. To quote a Scotsman I met at Sochi, the health resort on the Black Sea, "They're trying to feed me to death."

I liked the soldiers, most of whom seemed to be conscripts. They were everywhere. For most of the time they seemed to be off duty—touring museums, sightseeing, shopping. Sometimes the informality got a little out of hand: a friend told me of an officer he saw staggering down a Moscow street, totally drunk. On the whole, though, I found the casual off-duty soldiers refreshing, they did appear to be a part of the nation, rather than an institute in themselves, as is the case in most countries.

The great Art of Leningrad was of course stunning. I would recommend anyone to go there for a fortnight and spend most of the time walking around the galleries alone (i.e. without the rush and bustle of the Intourist guides). I was fortunate enough to go around several galleries, including the Hermitage, on closed days, without the crowds, but the few hours I had were quite insufficient. I just like to look, and look.

After massive destruction, both by misguided officials and invading armies, huge investment is being made all over the USSR to rebuild churches and palaces in their

former beauty. Personally the restored churches, especially those now being used again, seemed artificial places to me. The palaces, on the other hand, are so unbelievably opulent that it is difficult to imagine anyone living with such wealth and splendour. But they did, at the expense of everyone else. To walk through the rooms of these renovated palaces is utterly breathtaking. The power of the Czars must have been horrendous.

Our route from Leningrad took us to Irkutsk, south of the huge Lake Baikal in Siberia, where the temperature was a warm 25° C and not ice and snow, as my limited knowledge of Siberia had led me to expect (much to the amusement of everyone I met there). I liked this city, which had an atmosphere more like a small town or even village, especially with its old wooden houses—there's a picture of one in this book.

The weather changed quickly here, and overnight the temperature dropped rapidly, bringing snow! I managed to pick up some sort of influenza which hung around for ten days or so, by which time we were in Khabarovsk. My friends recommended an infallible cure of drinking 200 ml of neat vodka. The only result was the regrettable one of putting me off vodka. The next cure was recommended by the manager of the Khabarovsk Chinese restaurant, a mixture of herbs and roots from the surrounding forest. Various elderly but radiant members of staff were called to testify to the success of the wonder cure—all. I was briefly light headed but being unable to get further supplies of the cure easily, a doctor was contacted. My medical experience was brief, but impressive. I'd read somewhere in one of our awful British papers that Soviet doctors were poor and often had to be enticed with bribes to come out for non-emergencies. In fact a doctor and two nurses arrived, gave me a full medical and invited me back to hospital for an even more detailed one. Eventually I was let off with two sets of pills which pretty much cured me within 24 hours.

Khabarovsk, again, was a very pleasant place with quite a tough climate (very tough by my standards, quite tough by the Soviets'). Since I returned people have asked me what were the most unifying things across the nation, that made each city distinctly Soviet. To me these were the street murals, the cars, drink dispenser machines in the streets

and the meaningful statue of Lenin in the middle of each town. There is a universal absence of decoration, advertising and most forms of sales displays, so the restaurant sun canopies are very noticeable. These look like huge inverted flowers, often with four heads, facing downwards over the tables from one stalk. These were everywhere.

The lack of decoration and enticing commercial colours in buildings or clothes often made cities appear dull and drab. But once properly met, the people certainly were not.

I shall also remember Khabarovsk as the place where I had probably the most enjoyable experience of all, when I visited the Palace of Culture in full swing one evening. An Intourist guide in Leningrad had recommended that I visit one, and so I was expecting something good, but was totally unprepared for the amazing vigour and dedication. The traditional dance class was mind blowing; I enjoyed it far more than the professional group I saw later, even though the latter's contortions were incredible. Everyone's enthusiasm seemed to fill the place with life and energy; the traditional singers, mime and drama groups were all excellent and made me wish I could be part of them.

I also got my first hug in Khabarovsk, from a girl in the Young Theatre Group there, as part of a performance. That hug meant a lot.

When I was stopped at Irkutsk airport for taking photos, I was also disappointed that my fellow passengers, having stood around letting me blatantly take photographs, seemed very ready to jump in and offer evidence against me as soon as the policeman turned up. It does seem that, unless officially introduced, the majority of Soviets are antagonistic to Western visitors.

This contradiction is commented upon by Norman Mailer in an article about his "undercover" visit a few years ago, which I thought very honest:

"In America we prefer to treat strangers as friends," he says. "We are comfortable if we can call a man by his first name as soon as we are introduced. Whereas with Russians, the immediate impulse is to say 'Niet'."

This is sad, if understandable.

When I got home I read the Intourist brochure advice on photography, which reads:

"There are few restrictions for photography but it is prohibited to photograph airports, railway junctions, sea

ports, tunnels, bridges, military installations and from the air".

So now you know. I did promise the officer at Irkutsk that I'd pass the information on.

Considering that satellites can now take most detailed photographs of such areas, it is unfortunate that stringent regulations still exist, adding to the list of examples used by the propagandists to illustrate the "police state" image they have of the USSR.

Sochi is a seaside resort with many private beaches. The food there is good, the hotels high standard, a rare feature being that most of the lifts worked, as well as all the bedroom fittings, though the bath plug still did not fit.

It is a health resort, full of luxurious sanatoriums owned by unions, towns and factories, who send their staff here on comprehensive health and leisure courses. I visited my first non-hotel bar here, though we had to book in advance. The beer was good, especially as we had been deprived of it (and Pepsi—which incidentally tastes much better than the Western variety) in Siberia and the Far East—there was a shortage. My other remarkable experience at the Black Sea happened when we went fishing. We simply lowered lines, covered with hooks, into the water. The fish, obviously good communists, took the unbaited hooks and we hauled in lines full of fish. With true beginner's luck (or perhaps it's specially organised for tourists) I caught the biggest one, but whilst posing for photographs, it got away.

There were many things that took some understanding, to my Western eyes and mind. One of these is the Soviet attitude to war. I know very little Soviet history, but I've read *War and Peace*. I know about the Revolution, the Civil War, Stalin's purges and the 20 million dead in World War Two. I stood at the grave of 450,000 dead in Leningrad. I saw the written command of Adolf Hitler that "Leningrad was to be razed to the ground" with no prisoners taken.

The Soviet Union may be the biggest country on earth, but what other has known such suffering? Whilst we in Europe and the Americans have our heroic war stories there is little comparison with the USSR. Of course comparison is stupid, death is death, whether big death or little death. But to those fortunate enough to miss it all, it is easy not to think of it, not to understand what the country has gone through. It is this lack of thought that makes old but now impotent countries like Britain puff themselves

up and pretend to be a world force in warfare in the nuclear age, when in reality our only real role can be as a missile base for the USA. Britain has not been successfully invaded for almost a thousand years and so it can daydream. The USA is younger, it has never been invaded, so it can boast too, more loudly, because it has real power.

The USSR has been invaded many times on all of its huge frontier. The message I got is that they will never forget it, and nor are they going to let it happen again. But this doesn't mean that they're not going to be the ones crying out loudest for peace. They all know what suffering is.

I say this because there seems to many Western minds to be a contradiction. There is the omnipresence of soldiers, endless old military weaponry from the Great Patriotic War standing as memorials by which newly married couples traditionally pose. The huge murals depicting Red Army victories indicate an aggressive warmongering nation in many visitors' minds. Old men and women still wear their medals. Even in schools there are invariably reports on the war and school children armed with guns ceremonially guard war memorials.

It all seems to contradict the Peace Committee and the peace murals and is very easy to misinterpret. Even now my explanation—that the Soviet Union doesn't want its children to forget, and additionally wants them to be ready if and when aggression comes, but still screams for peace—can easily be discounted by those who don't want to consider it a possibility.

Yet I can see no better reason for a desire for peace. It also offers a reason why the USSR maintains so much ground force, ineffective as it is in the days of missiles. The European front is small compared to the huge border the USSR would have to defend in times of war. Even though I'm sure a sizeable tank force could be mustered to drive through the new Channel Tunnel and compel all Britons to become socialists!

As we travelled round, quite naturally the people who had helped to organise the trip would ask, "Well, which meeting has been the most helpful to you today?" or, "Whilst you were in our city, who did you like the most?" And I would disappoint them by replying that I could not say; every single meeting was instructive and often enjoyable, even the

occasional dead boring one when someone had prepared a long lecture was useful in its way. In the end we devised a system whereby I rated meetings as a percentage, "I'd give that one a 90", or a 50 or a 30, a percentage of perfection, I suppose.

By the end of the trip though, I knew I had learned one lesson that I could put above everything else, and that is that we need to talk, about absolutely everything.

I suppose I came to find out if Soviets were human beings, and discovered that they were VERY human. We have the same fears, the same desperate desire for peace. But being human, we blindly scream at each other, "We want peace and you're stopping us."

In other sections of this book I have gone into great detail of the way in which I think Novosti and Intourist distort relations on one side, whilst the media in other countries mislead in the other direction. Such distortion is primitive of course, blind human fear of something that is the reverse of one's own society. The attitude is now as it's always been, to turn away, rather than try to understand. In the Soviet Union glasnost looks set to improve things to a great extent, and all decent people must hope that it does. My feeling was that people were all waiting for each other, few people were quite brave enough to take individual steps not surprisingly. Since I returned Gorbachev has warned caution to those who do move too fast, so it looks like the process will be a slow one, which could be for the better.

It is true that the USSR has a lot to gain from certain advancements in ideas. But it also has a lot to lose. People, including myself, criticise because the society seems to be twenty years behind the West in many ways, but on one level it still has something we have really lost, a bit of nature. The food is more natural, there is less variety and less convenience, but there is a great deal of real fresh food, none of the artificial additives that pack out our own foods. Instead of mindless papers, discos and pubs there is more reading, thinking and appreciation of art. Yes, a bit of trivia and mindless relaxation certainly wouldn't do your average Russian any harm, but on the other hand it would be sad if the country was to go as far away from some sort of national "soul" as my own country has. It could not go the same way of course, because of the different structure,

but it could inherit some of the less admirable characteristics.

On the other hand if Aeroflot can be improved drastically, the deafening heavy rock bands be taken out of the hotel restaurants at dinner time, the embarrassing VIP enclosures be taken out at the circus and the bath plugs be made to fit the hotel baths; then the Soviet Union will really begin to progress!

As the world gets smaller, so do the excuses for continuing a small minded attitude. Everyone knows more and more and it is only a matter of time before all the hedging has been cut away and we are left with one choice. Everyone I met in the USSR who expressed an opinion was confident that humans would make the right decision. "We are optimists," they said. So we should all be fighting together to break down the walls and iron curtains from either side.

It is not good enough that both sides claim they represent "justice, equality, democracy" and that the other doesn't. It isn't good enough that US *People* magazine claims to want to report the USSR as it would the USA and then seeks out all the Soviet rebels to slag the country off. Surprisingly enough, *People* don't do this in the USA. I'm sure Soviet publications do the same, concentrating on unemployment and poverty which the vast majority do not suffer from.

There seem to be two big gulfs—first, the opposing views we have of single concepts; second, the problems individuals have in communicating. There are established routes of course. The Friendship Society of the USSR has branches all over the world, and I met many sincere and intelligent people involved in it. But there was an air of unreality hanging over it all for me. The magazine *British-Soviet Friendship* in my country seems rather too Novosti for the likes of those with critical aspirations.

My country is as bad of course in its own way. I am not saying the USSR is the only offender. On the contrary, the fact that I even try to suggest that things could be improved by the USSR means a lot—I haven't a hope in hell of Britain or America taking a lead. But if the Soviets can take a lead in everyday human communication as well as in recent Arms Control talks, then more and more people in my country and the West generally will have no choice but to think about what's wrong and what's right. If the Soviets'



case is just, then I too am an optimist. I believe the ordinary people of my country will see who is right and they will use their voices and their votes to give power to those that are right.

It will take a generation, so much damage has been done to relationships in the past fifty years and more. But we must start now. We can all remain totally convinced that we've got it right for the moment, but at the same time we must stop being so very offensive to each other. Endlessly telling the Americans that they're warmongering imperialists will not turn them overnight into peace-loving socialists, as they have no reason to believe the peace-loving socialists who tell them. On the other hand, the free-thinking Americans accusing the brainwashed "commies" of wanting to invade most of the world (as we're told they did in Czechoslovakia, Poland etc.) isn't calculated to make the brainwashed "commies" suddenly friendly with the warmongering imperialists.

We must recognise that we're all humans. We must try to think of things we agree on (like tea, sport, Robin Hood, desire for peace, the Beatles etc.), talk about them and swap ideas. Then, who knows, in fifty or a hundred years, when the world really is tiny, we may suddenly realise the differences are not so big after all, and our opinions of right and wrong agree more closely.

Steps forward are being made. After I returned from my trip I heard the first Radio Bridge. It was disappointing to me to hear the advertising and hype that the radio station in Britain used to accompany the programme of such immense importance, but it is the sort of crassness we have to live with. It was amazing and exciting to hear people talking live in Moscow, and though the three young Soviets were rather conservative in their questioning (they could have responded to an attack on the Soviet electoral system with an attack on the British one, for example), they did manage to instil the need for thought on a few topics within the more attentive and open-minded listener here.

On the other hand the three Soviets were slightly too positive about the USSR to be fully believable. Their assertion of a total lack of persecution of the Jews, or restrictions if they want to leave the country, was a little hard for most Westerners to believe.

When I was in Moscow an editor at one of the publishers

expressed his anger to me that an American delegation he had met the previous day professed ignorance of the TV bridges that had been formed between the USA and the USSR. They had given the excuse that there were so many US TV stations that they couldn't be expected to keep a watch out for all of them.

The chap at the publishers said that wasn't a good enough reason and I agree. But at the same time it is quite possible to miss these things. I only heard of the Radio Bridge by accident here, there is so little publicity for them, which is sickening. They are so important that they should be on prime time radio and TV every week. It is a damnation of my country and others that they are not widely publicised and promoted, especially as I suspect to our credit, it was the Western countries that pioneered the idea.

The Radio Bridge is a move in the right direction at long last. We do need more exchanges at every level of course. We need proper education in all schools on the topic of global conscience. We need a wholly non-political organisation of honest friendship, that doesn't set out to make a point for any nation, but just to draw conclusions about what is good and bad about it all.

There is a limit we can reach in debate if we try to argue. By the time I left for home I felt that the harder I tried to communicate the less I could understand—when it came to political philosophy. Conversations became more and more confrontational; they ended in smiles but I was left dissatisfied and I think the people I was talking with often felt the same.

I was not trying to convince them that the Western argument was right, I was just trying to discover if they had any doubts about the Soviet point of view. They hadn't. They wanted me to agree that their argument was right. I couldn't. I saw the logic in it, but then I remembered there was some logic in the opposing argument I had heard back home. Which one was right I couldn't say.

In the end I was leaving those wanting a good argument frustrated because I simply said, "I don't know what your argument is, but I'm sure it is correct." By this I meant that whatever their argument was I knew they believed in it and nothing I could say would alter that belief. I had no wish to give myself brainache in such a fruitless attempt.

I think, therefore, that all positive contact should be

concentrated on first highlighting the good things each society has to offer, rather than the present reverse. The better ideas. It is not a matter of closing our eyes to what we see as each other's faults, but simply putting such matters to one side until we get some debate started and make progress, then we'll be in a better position to understand. If we just shout abuse at each other all the effort will be wasted.

I know many intelligent and open-minded people in my country and in Europe. I met many open-hearted, open-minded intelligent Russians, and I cannot see why glasnost shouldn't succeed the world over. It is not just the Soviets who need it, it is just that they are the ones honest enough to admit it.

### *SO WHY?*

It appears that mankind has a huge blindspot when it comes to looking forward and looking back. History has a lot to teach us, we look back and see systems that look primitive and often barbaric, just as in a few hundred years people will, I hope, look back and see how primitive and barbaric we are. In the past mankind has not been able to do as much damage to his planet as now, and even if he was doing he wouldn't know about it. We're all doing incredible amounts of damage and we know what we're doing. So we have no excuse. It is not enough to say this is short-term greed, the damage we are doing transcends mere greed, it is just wholly stupid.

On the one hand it would take a very big step to put the world to rights, on the other it's a very small one. The big one involves doing it the way we are now, relying on lots and lots of groups and individuals to put pressure on us to make us do things right. The quick way is that we all suddenly start being responsible to our fellow men and our planet.

It's a long shot but it might just work.

*"It is sad but true that American leaders are invariably ready to accept fascism in other countries and do business with it. Since fascism is the foul disease of the rich when capitalism breaks down, so our leaders can understand it..."*

*"... Communism, however, terrifies the American rich. After all, it is the tyranny of the poor when society breaks up altogether. So in America we are encouraged to abhor it in every form. We live with the scenario that Russia is an evil force. Now the world is on the edge of destroying itself can we afford the abhorrence any longer?..."*

*"... We are a great nation. Let us take the step of assuming that we will be greater yet as we come to live with generous understanding of the real horror-packed world that still lies before us."*

Norman Mailer,  
*The Sunday Times Magazine*, November 4,  
1984

"The truth" is a very abstract concept; really it can be divided into two main types. First, things that are definitely true—grass being green, rocks sinking in water and so on. These things are true so long as we trust our senses. The second type of truth concerns things we choose to believe.

This latter half of the truth makes up a pretty major part of what we believe. It's made up of what we are told is true, or at least have no reason to doubt. This includes what

we read, what we see on television, what we are told by other people. Very often this truth has been passed between a lot of different people before it finally reaches us. What we get is the report of what our friend was told by the shopkeeper who had seen the film by the writer who saw the actual event.

If we were still talking about the grass being green, then it's pretty safe to take for granted that the truth has passed more or less unscathed through the differing forms of communication to reach us. But usually the concept is rather more complex. "Were the Americans justified in bombing Libya?", "Should the Soviets have shot down the Korean airliner?" Somewhere or other the event has actually happened but then something strange occurs. In Europe and America the truth becomes, "Reagan stands firm against barbaric terrorist atrocities by lunatic Libyan leader and shows him what will happen if he blows up any more innocent people ..., ... meanwhile warmongering Soviets shoot down crippled airliner that has strayed into their air space and have killed hundreds of innocent people." In the Soviet news the truth comes out differently—"Barbaric American imperialist Reagan blows up peace-loving Libyan leader's palace in act of unprovoked aggression. NB—all crimes that had previously been blamed on innocent Libyans were in fact carried out by CIA ..., ... meanwhile Soviets regrettably shoot down airliner carrying US spying equipment, flying over sensitive Soviet territory, hundreds of miles off course and refusing to respond to identification requests or landing instructions from Soviet jet fighters."

This is "the truth" and, depending on which version we are given, this is what we found our beliefs on. Even when the truth becomes more outlandish: "Airline crash off Southern Ireland caused by bit of Soviet satellite dropping out of the sky and colliding with it ..." or something similar, we still believe it.

Of course we have to. "The truth" isn't just what we read about world events, it's our whole way of life, our upbringing, our education, our religion, our working lives, our retirement, even our death. We live our lives under a capitalist system or a socialist system; we have our god or our Lenin; we have our opinions and we talk about them. We try to be optimistic; we hope that the big powerful men who control our opinions don't turn out to be loonies like

Adolf Hitler. History will laugh at our stupidity as we laugh at history. We hope, and maybe pray, that they won't decide to use those powerful weapons we've been discussing the pros and cons of having, so powerfully, for most of our lives. We write a lot about it .... look, I'm doing it now! We read even more—yes, you're doing it now. We live. We hope.

If we didn't we'd all be so paranoid we'd end up at the fundamental thoughts of "Am I real?" "Is the world a figment of my imagination?"

So the world keeps turning, time passes and ideas change.

Though life is still cheap in some parts of Africa and southern Asia, nations move towards a greater value of their population.

Now that the world stands on the brink of self-inflicted destruction, the men who could wipe out hundreds and thousands of human beings at a wave of a hand are finally dying out (thankfully), and being replaced by elected people with the power to kill billions. Hitler put a lot of effort into his insanity; whilst he was succeeding the argument sounded good to the Nazi Germans—as it would to any nation being fed complete lies about what was actually happening. Can you blame the Germans of that time—not the leaders, but those who just read and listened and believed?

In Chernobyl a bit of the planet is poisoned for ever, can you blame the Soviets? All over the world we build nuclear power plants, with "minimal risk", because they are "essential" to the power needs of the major nations. When the next accident happens, who will be to blame? When the next Hitler comes along and the people of whichever country he happens to rule believe in him, who will be to blame?

All over the world little groups develop and say, "We really must stop poisoning the world with pollution!", "We really must stop wasting our resources." "We want peace by eradicating nuclear weaponry." "We want peace by maintaining the balance of nuclear weaponry ..." Most of these groups are unofficial, most have a few thousand people involved, and many millions sit at home doing nothing—agreeing or disagreeing with them in animated conversation after dinner, but really far more interested in the football on TV.

The "activists" become frustrated. "But we are right, why aren't we heard, supported!" They lie awake at night anguished, unable to sleep for fear of nuclear holocaust and

endlessly wondering how so many intelligent men can sit around a table in Geneva and apparently achieving nothing.

Somewhere along the road between nations, truth disappears. The grass is green at each end, the people who receive the truth are the same, but somehow, somewhere, the truth is severed, abused, changed. Bits are taken out and other bits from some other part of one particular version of the truth are stuck over the gaps to make it all sound a lot nicer. Very convincing arguments about why this truth is true and other people's truth isn't are developed and become belief, so that even on the rare occasion that the two different truths bounce back and hit each other head on, the two sides can argue for five hours, but still believe what they believed already, only gaining a serious headache. This must be what happens in Geneva.

So what can we conclude? Well, we all have our opinions. It is my book so I will give you mine.

Firstly, is there a true truth? Does one side have it right, the other side have it wrong? No, I don't believe so. There is enough first-hand evidence to damn both countries. I have been told lies in Britain and I have been told lies in the Soviet Union.

Both sides argue strongly, "We are right, we want peace, something must be done, why does the other side stop us progressing to world peace?" But the problem is not one of having different aims and hopes, it is one of having mutual fear. It is one of seeing only our own viewpoint, not trying to reason from the other person's view. We say, "Right, we want peace and this is how we'll go about it." And the next Hitler comes along.

No one ever says, "Right, we want peace and they want peace, let's work out the way, take our individual negatives and work out the answer." They each say this because the other side doesn't actually want peace.

Both sides proclaim they want peace but then spend their time being very rude and negative about the country they want to have peace with—those exploiting imperialists or those red-eyed commies. The meaning of the insults is lost; one person in a thousand in Britain or America actually knows what communism means, and though imperialism is more clearly recognised by Soviets, its application is ambiguous in the way it is bandied about.

Why can no one just say, "They live like that, we live

like this; we both want the same thing, so let's sort it out."

History has shown that every great empire has its failing, that everything has its positive and negative, its right and wrong. How can people be so stupid as to imagine they have the right answer when, however logical that answer is made to appear, history proves it wrong, or only partly correct.

It is no excuse to say, "Well we want peace, but they don't."

But what of the truth? I have delved deep into my own opinions. I am a pessimist perhaps, the attitudes of people I have met all over the world have given me little confidence in my fellow humans, or myself. When it comes down to it, nations, political systems, religions are really immaterial. It is our attitude to each other that counts. I agree with the ideals of communism and those of Christianity; the system of socialism is morally and humanely far closer to what is right than the current brand of "popular capitalism" in Europe and America. I can see a time when countries like my own have to stand against the world as South Africa does now, and lie openly about the hypocrisy of a system. But by that time the world must be a fairer place anyway, and who knows what unimagined events will have occurred by then.

Groups of people shape themselves into societies, apparently powerful nations, but in the end they are all little people, playing with fire. Soviets, Americans, Europeans, Africans, Asians, Australians—are all just people. I think that's true.

Truth is a rare commodity. Speaking the truth is even more difficult than knowing it. (There are many moral little tales about those who decide to tell the truth for a day and end up insulting everyone). Clearly, telling the truth is only part of what is needed. We should turn a blind eye to the petty details that could offend our fellow men and obscure the more important facts.

Indeed this is already the policy of world governments and their representative media organisations who happily give their peoples the main facts and ignore those irritating little details that might throw that element of doubt into what is reported, and the angle of its reporting. We call this "being economical with the truth"; it is a skill of all people who wish to get their own way, whether leaders or school children. They simply ignore those details which aren't running in their favour. Hence the contradictory reports.



But things are getting out of hand. In my country economy with the truth is a chronic problem. All our social problems seem to be caused and (potentially but never actually) cured by things that a casual observer would have judged to be the root. The answer to violent crime is not, apparently, a move to reverse the current trend of disillusionment with law and order. The disillusionment being caused by the association of police and judges with the people who rule the country and create the laws which don't give people work or money to feed their families and pay their debts. The cure is in fact to curb the sale of guns (the availability of guns being the cure in America).

Likewise the growing turmoil in our schools, with disillusioned children becoming uncooperative and violent, some innocents might claim is due to the fact that a larger percentage of them leaving school won't get a job, and join a training scheme regardless of their academic qualifications, and are unlikely to get a job after that either. We might assume that the social degeneration of the society we live in, the pressures of being members of unemployed or single parent families, even living under the nuclear threat—that these things are the cause of such despondency. But no, it is entirely the teachers' fault. Bad teachers we have.

Our government even claims to be a government of the people when only just over 30 per cent of adults voted for it, over 40 per cent against, and 20 per cent didn't bother to vote at all.

Yet our papers are full of how great our country is, especially compared to that awful police state—the Soviet Union, full of evil Communists plotting to extend their iron curtain across Europe, trapping more people within it, and their farcical one party electoral system. What sort of election is that?

(Well, it isn't one where the party most people vote against is given power, that's for sure.)

In America anti-Soviet propaganda is stronger still; and of course in the Soviet Union Novosti churns out publications about how fabulous the Soviet Union is and what an awful mess the rest of the world is in.

So, it appears, all nations are as bad as each other. Most governments believe they are right, and they cannot be accused of hypocrisy unless they openly carry out policies which, taking everything they can think of into account, they

believe are bad for the majority of people making up their nation (as did the Russian tsars).

But still there are problems. I am an idealistic young man. I live now, my life style is not conventional under any system, but I work or I cheat for my living. I have my own morality and it exists outside of any political system—though I don't think I'd get away with it in the Soviet Union. So you understand that I can praise the good things and a system that I know is generally fairer than my own. But I cannot pretend that having been brought up in my world, I could live easily under Soviet socialism. Of course, it works the other way as we have seen from the much publicised return of emigres back to the USSR. We are all human, products of our upbringing.

My conclusions for the better world are these:

1: Vast expansion of tourism between East and West and the total reorganisation of tourism to "Meet the People" tours, so meeting ordinary people comes first, sightseeing second. All tourists should be allowed seminars on both sides to whom they can invite anyone and talk about anything (I believe this would benefit the Soviet cause more than the Western, but more importantly it will benefit everyone to a greater or lesser degree).

2: A major governing organisation of people aged under 35 be established in all nations with the express aim of improving international relations and organising internal and external re-education, liaising in the form of a world group. I believe this has been done before, but a new group could now be launched, the time is ripe.

3: Compulsory education of global consciousness in all schools throughout the world, and increasing penfriend links.

4: All major world newspapers be forced to accept a couple of pages of views on major international events written by journalists who are likely to hold the opposite view to the reporting they give. Obviously this would have to be controlled somehow, but it should not just simply be a publication where the suitable articles from foreign journals are lifted by nationals to their own advantage.

5: Documentaries shown on TV just films of travel around cities or countryside in Moscow, London or wherever. No commentary, no focusing on London tramps or Moscow queues. Just perhaps a half hour "Day in the life" documen-

tary of a Soviet citizen or a British citizen—as far as is possible with a TV camera following.

6: A world court of human rights, which can try to prove its worth and its wisdom and in so doing attract the subscription of fair minded people.

7: National and global polls on such topics as “Would you rather have nuclear power or an energy shortage?”, and governments should then act on what the people actually want. In little countries such as mine, still farcically clinging to past power, we should have polls on whether we should have nuclear weapons (which of course we sho....)

These are my simplistic rough-hewn ideas.

*"British Airways obviously receives a massive Government grant to decondition tourists after a period in the Soviet Union. (The whole Moscow—London leg is an induction course back into the Free World.) Hardly has the plane lifted off than you are besieged with Sunday colour supplements, vitamin-enriched fruit juices and smoked salmon sandwiches with parsley. The stewards and stewardesses engage you in hearty British banter, keeping you up to date with the trivia of British life (football results, pop charts, race riots, etc.). The Captain invites you up to the cockpit to view the wonders of Western Technology. By the time you fly over Gotland, you are completely readapted to consumerism, and when you land at Heathrow, you've forgotten about your Soviet experience altogether..."*

*USSR: From an Original Idea by  
Karl Marx, London, 1986*

Leaving Sheremetyevo-2 airport in Moscow was rather like the arrival procedure in reverse. First stop was Customs, with my baggage having hideously increased its weight three-fold due to all the presents of large heavy books from my Russian friends.

After I had rapidly filled out an extra form for the irritated Customs officer I was ushered through quickly; he was apparently unaware of the two extra suitcases I had acquired.

British Airways had arranged for only one check-in desk to be opened so a slow queue developed in homage to the Customs and Passport Control traditions. The queue mainly consisted of fat American and British businessmen and I listened to a ghastly middle-aged American woman wearing a designer tent complaining about the queue and blatantly pushing in front of anyone who didn't move their cases forward fast enough (obviously upset because she couldn't buy her way to the front).

"God, British Airways! It's lucky they're the only choice or I'd fly someone else! You know, six Saturdays running I drove from the chalet to Paris to get the afternoon flight to London. And every time they sent the luggage to Geneva! I was entertaining most times and of course the plane landed just late enough for Harrods and Selfridges to be closed so I couldn't buy a new dress. It was hell."

"Welcome back to capitalism!" I thought. I could fully understand why the baggage handlers had sent her bags to Geneva—I certainly would have done. It was tempting to suggest that she might try an all-night tent shop when Selfridges and Harrods were closed, but I refrained.

As I reached check-in the BA girl's smile disappeared when she saw my luggage. There were problems paying the excess fee—which had risen from £10 on the last Soviet plane, to £175 on British Airways. There was a problem paying this, I was in "no man's land"; the woman in the excess fares office wouldn't take roubles, similarly BA wouldn't accept an English cheque (much to my surprise) and I had spent my last international money on a few foreign beers the previous night.

The man in charge had to be called over on the walky-talky. "Is he travelling Club Class?" he asked. "No, economy," replied the girl, with regret. The manager, a genial gentleman, turned up. I wasn't travelling Club Class so I wasn't going to be allowed to get away with it.

"Listen, old chap, we can't let you take this through, you know."

An elaborate plan was hatched whereby the baggage would be kept in Moscow until I paid for its delivery in England whereupon I could make yet another trip down from Nottingham and out to Heathrow to collect it. This man must have worked in the Soviet Consulate in London, I thought!

Couldn't they put it on the plane with me and I could pay

as soon as I arrived and take it with me? Well no, no, this is money we're talking about and we can't trust you where money's involved.

The situation was resolved when the manager realised I'd got English cheques and decided they could accept them after all. By now I knew I was back to the land where money is god, with a bump.

Shaken by my loss of wealth—the worst since the Moscow hotel phone bill in the early days of my stay—I crept half dazed through Passport Control and had my remaining bags X-rayed again before I entered the departure lounge. The plane was an hour or so late and I watched my fat expensive bags getting wet on the tarmac in the rain and wondered how the heavy books would fare against the weather.

I was glad to be going home of course, looking forward to fast foods and a pint of British beer. It is true too, what it says at the start of this section; by the time I landed at Heathrow the whole month had acquired a somewhat dream-like quality.

But the lessons I learned are real, the people I met, the friends I made, all stay with me now. I know I'll be back to see them, and in the meantime I am able to wish them, and everyone else, the very best.

I am not sure what the Novosti Agency publishes in the Russian language, if anything, but in English and other world languages they are responsible for the racks of booklets with titles like *USSR. 100 Questions and Answers* and *EEC—Illusions versus Reality*. They also produce the paper *Moscow News*.

I enjoyed most of *Moscow News*: the features were interesting and the reporting was generally open-minded, with a good deal of reasonable, positive criticism.

The booklets, on the other hand, totally sickened me. For me they are the epitome of all that is evil in the world and I found myself swearing in disbelief at every sentence I read. It may seem an excessive reaction to such small items of propaganda; yet it was not just the half truth (which is as bad as lies) and the mindless, inhuman and unreal dross contained within the booklets that upset me. It was the fact that they existed on the border between real Russia and the tourists' Russia. They betrayed all that the people I had met told me: all those smiles, hugs and handshakes were wiped away by Novosti.

I knew, too, that all these Russians I had met, who so longed to be friends with the people of other nations, were standing just outside the airport, whilst inside, those very foreigners passed through, picking up their Novosti booklets and leaving in the assurance that all Soviets really are indoctrinated, mindless, inhuman and taking in blatant propaganda. Such an opportunity to do the valuable thing, shake hands and say hello and welcome, is totally destroyed thanks to the efforts of Novosti, aided and abetted by Intourist.

So what is so bad about Novosti? Well let's take an example, *Soviet Weekly*, the British paper supplied with material by Novosti. In the current issue (2,371) there are 63 articles. Of these 63, 16 of the major ones are anti-American, 1 anti-British, 1 anti-South African. 63 of them are pro-Soviet.

In many ways the articles are no worse than those in most British papers. For example: Soviet complaints about Americans imprisoning Human Rights campaigners in mental hos-

pitals; reports that all Soviets in the USA are subject to electronic surveillance, a couple of pieces denouncing the failure of the West to respond to arms limitation suggestions put forward by the USSR. In other words, exactly the same as you'll find in a Western newspaper, only with the good and bad roles reversed.

Much of Novosti is no worse than the worst of the media in my own country. Though that in itself is worse for people hoping to find something better in the Soviet system, when they are already aware of the faults in their own.

Where *Soviet Weekly* and virtually all Novosti publications fall below contempt, is their total blindness to anything other than the fact that what is supposed to be right according to them is right. There are no exceptions. Everything about the Soviet Union is utter perfection, it is an utopian society. On the other hand, everything about the United States and the West is totally bad, incorrect and often evil. Booklets with titles such as *USSR. 100 Questions and Answers* and *EEC—Illusions versus Reality* could more accurately be retitled *USSR. 100 Reasons Why We're Perfect* and *The EEC is Totally Wrong—Here's Why*.

Strangely enough, Novosti never publish booklets with titles like *If The USSR is So Fab, Why Do We Literally Beg You For Foreign Currency?* or *Why People You Meet in the Streets Want To Buy the Shirts off Your Back* and *Internal Policy of the USSR—Why It Changes So Often and Why We Instantly Expect the Rest of the World to Believe Glasnost is Real and Lasting*. Or even very simple titles like *Why Aeroflot Is So Bad*.

There are publications equally biassed in my own country. Indeed after three weeks of life away from any Western newspaper I bought an old copy of *The Daily Telegraph* and was as sickened by its contents as by anything Novosti has yet spewed out. Publications along the same lines include *Inter-City Magazine* in Britain for our national railway network, which is improving in some ways, deteriorating in others, but magazine praises everything, apart from the odd detail like "the filling in a cheese and ham sandwich on the 8. 22 to Manchester was a little too salty—otherwise keep up the good work, BR!"

Novosti tells us that the reason they can only praise everything about the USSR is that everything worth talking about is super: no Jews ever get beaten up or lose their jobs,



anyone can leave the country who wants to, the population agree that pop music is a disease, every single young Soviet male can't wait to be called up for national service, religion is free and thriving, all artists are happy just to produce dull work that is, coincidentally, totally in agreement with Novosti, and so on.

I was surprised to see a friend apparently absorbed by a Novosti publication. In between exclamations of "Liar!" she explained: "It's interesting. I am able to work out my own point of view by thinking the opposite of Novosti". So perhaps the best way to get close to reality is to take away all the negatives.

It is difficult to understand how those behind Novosti imagine it works. Ignoring the fact that the English language they use went out of date slightly before the last war, it can only be assumed that they are working on the same principles as the English imperialists during the last century and the first half of this; that is, by convincing the educationally ignorant (a large number of Novosti publications are sold cheaply in the third world) of the correctness of their argument by denying there is an alternative; the Novosti case is divine.

Otherwise they must assume that Western tourists are all totally stupid and totally blind—which is quite a plausible belief on their part judging by the way they treat the Western case in their publications.

Glasnost has brought a great deal to the Soviet Union internally and improved its credibility with those outside who always tried to keep open minds about the nation, despite all the bad things they were told. Rapid steps forward are being taken, but Novosti hangs a stone round the neck of internationally positive ideals, a ghost of the past. Those grim-faced, narrow-minded old men, each authors of hundreds of essays, featured on the backs of these books, should be given quiet jobs somewhere, where they can't irritate people with their one-track repeats, and a new generation of positive yet balanced thinkers should be brought in to put forward a good case whilst acknowledging the failures.

It is a good thing at least that the Soviet system allows such a change to be possible. In my country money is essential for such power, and those with such money almost invariably support the propaganda that perpetuates their power, and therefore their money.

## INFORMATION USED IN THIS BOOK

In certain sections I have referred to specific publications, but in addition I have used a number of sources throughout this book. Frequently, by taking two extremes, I have tried to strike a balance between two or more attitudes.

These texts include:

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Additional information was provided by articles in *Soviet Weekly* between July and September, 1987; *Moscow News* May-June 1987, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* between September 1984 and November 1987. Notably the *Observer Guide To Moscow* by Peter Ustinov and "Mailer in Moscow" published by *The Sunday Times*. I also read some copies of *20th Century and Peace* magazine published by the Soviet Peace Committee, the monthly compilation of *Pravda* and the special USSR edition of *People* magazine, June 1987.

In specific sections, I am grateful to CND for supplying copies of articles on their view of Soviet policy published in *Tribune* and *Sanity*.

The interview with Boris Piotrovsky contains information about the Hermitage gleaned from the beautiful book *Saved for Humanity*, Aurora Art Publishers, Leningrad, 1985.

The information on the Russian Orthodox Church is taken from the 1987 Novosti publication *We Choose Life* by Metropolitan Filaret.

The interview with Jennie Sutton contains part of her article requested, but then rejected by *The Times*, and eventually published by *British-Soviet Friendship* magazine.

"Comparing Women's Rights" section contains quotes from *Greenham Common: Women at the Wire*, edited by Barbara Harford and Sarah Hopkins, published by the Women's Press, 1984. Also from *The Sceptical Feminist* by Janet Radcliffe-Richards, published by Penguin in 1980: and from *A Dictionary of Modern Politics* by David Robertson, published by Europa Publications Limited, London, 1985.

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Eddie Limonov's book *It's me, Eddie* first roused my interest in what the Soviet Union is *really* like. Incidentally, I learned of Limonov's work from *The Sunday Times* who had given me my first "break" a few months previously, and without whom I would not have reached the "Foreign Author" status required to be eligible to write a book in the "Impressions of the USSR" series. I thought that *It's me, Eddie* was one of the most brilliant attempts at portraying "the truth" that I had ever read. Alas Limonov seems little known in either his native Russia or abroad; possibly the destiny of a man who tries to be honest.

The idea to carry out specific interviews is loosely lifted from the book *Hiroshima* by American journalist John Hersey, who was one of the first Westerners to visit Hiroshima after the atomic bomb had been dropped. He simply recounted what he saw, together with the stories of six survivors, introducing these as ordinary people—the fact that they were Japanese is only evident from their names. This attitude of "they're people wherever they come from" is another important ideal I work for.

The racist attitude that closes the minds of many people is difficult to overcome. One of Britain's major satirical forces, the TV show "Spitting Image" illustrated this with a skit on the usual presentation of TV News. Under the caption "Death" they announced "2 Britons and 236 non-entities have been killed in a tragic train/plane crash or motorway pile-up."

Then under the heading "Foreign Death"—"Lots of very unpleasant things have been happening in the Middle East although nobody seems to know exactly what, where or how to stop it."

More conventional thanks go to my mother, father and wife Sally for their continued support, encouragement and assistance. My mother especially for typing up the first-draft of this manuscript whilst I was taking it easy on the beautiful Shetland isle of Foula. Thanks to John and Issabel for putting us up there.

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I hope that all their efforts will be justified, and that this book will play a small part in bringing friendship and understanding between the ordinary people of the Soviet Union and the West.

## REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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**Патрик Торн**

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*на английском языке*

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Patrick Thorne, a British writer, was born in 1964. After failing his final exams at the age of 18 he became unemployed. His writings on unemployment were published by *The Sunday Times* and then in a book, *The A-Z of Unemployment*, which later formed the basis of BBC TV's "World of UB40" series. After two years of unemployment and short-term jobs he returned to college in 1984 and was awarded a Diploma in Writing with English in 1986. He is currently studying for a degree.

Patrick continues to write on unemployment and social issues, but is more successful as a journalist on skiing, a subject on which he has published a number of books, and on computers. He claims that both subjects are far better paid than unemployment, which is rarely publicised from the point of view of the actual unemployed people in Britain. Upon completion of his degree he hopes to travel the world and then begin home in Shetland, north of Scotland.

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